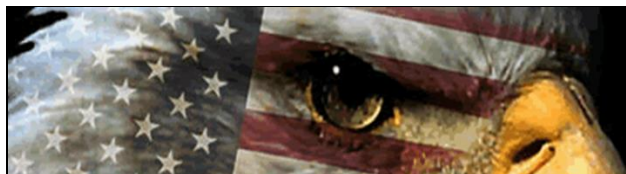



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/05 Hawaii power plant: threatening letters
SOURCE	https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2023/01/05/heco-working-with-fbi-after-oahu-power-plant-receives-several-letters-with-threatening-innuendos/
GIST	<p>HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Officials at Hawaiian Electric's Kahe Power Plant in Leeward Oahu confirm they're working with the FBI after receiving several letters with threatening innuendos.</p> <p>The development comes a month after federal authorities posted a terrorism alert bulletin warning of threats to critical infrastructure. Law enforcement sources tell HNN that the letters don't appear to be an isolated incident. The sources say that multiple power plants across the country have received similar messages.</p> <p>Security at HECO Kahe Power Plant turned over a total of three letters containing the innuendos to the FBI and HPD on Tuesday morning, sources told Hawaii News Now.</p>

The messages arrived via the U.S. Postal Service and are believed to have been sent from Michigan, they said.

A HECO spokesperson confirms the agency is cooperating with law enforcement.

The letters come just weeks after federal authorities posted the terrorism alert bulletin warning. Since mid-November, there have been a series of attacks on power stations in Washington, Oregon and North Carolina.

According to CBS News, several substations were damaged by gunfire leaving tens of thousands of residents without electricity for days. It's unknown if any of those attacks are related to the disturbing letters.

Retired FBI counterterrorism agent Tom Simon said using the mail to send a threat violates federal law.

"So it's definitely something the FBI would investigate. The fact that the threat appears to be targeting critical infrastructure would definitely ratchet up that sense of urgency," Simon said., adding the FBI lab in Quantico has technology that can lift fingerprints from both envelopes and the letters themselves.

"If the stamp and the envelope were not self adhesive, the sender likely licked them. And I've seen cases where the FBI lab was able to separate the human DNA from the glue on the envelope to identify the sender," said Simon.

In an email, an FBI spokesperson said it takes threats to the public very seriously. "We work closely with our partners to assess and respond to threats and keep our community safe," the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, HECO officials confirm "there were no evacuations or service disruption" related to the incident.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Marysville cracks down public drug use
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/new-marysville-ordinance-allows-police-make-arrests-public-drug-use/EGFJYX5DWZFPJMS4TIV75EVL7A/
GIST	<p>The city of Marysville is cracking down on public drug use, as it passed a new city ordinance that allows police to make arrests for first offenses of people using drugs in public. The ordinance prohibits the use of controlled substances in public without a prescription.</p> <p>Violation of the new law is a misdemeanor subject to arrest.</p> <p>The city passed the ordinance back in December of 2022.</p> <p>"We're really trying to protect the public here and help get people who have a narcotics issue some help," police chief Erik Scairpon said. "We need some kind of an incentive measure, that is primarily the reason behind a criminal justice approach to these things."</p> <p>However, not everyone believes this ordinance will get to the root of the problem.</p> <p>"I understand that the community is looking for some safety but at the same time incarceration is never going to be truly effective for those suffering with substance use disorder," April Provost, with Ideal Option, an addiction treatment center, said. "Simply incarcerating folks for using drugs is not going to get to any of the root problems and it's not going to solve the epidemic."</p> <p>The ACLU of Washington gave KIRO 7 this statement in regards to the new ordinance:</p>

"We will need to further analyze the ordinance, but we are weary of any proposal to further punish people who have substance use disorders, as we'll never arrest and punish our way to a solution for this issue. We'll always urge officials to treat substance use disorders as the public health issue that they are and make investments in proven approaches that address this issue through prevention, outreach, and recovery services."

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HEADLINE	01/05 Pierce Co. homeless village draws ire
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/pierce-county-village-microhome-tiny-homes-homelessness-unhoused-people-spanaway-lake-residents-neighbors-concerned-drugs-transients-crime-concerns#
GIST	<p>SPANAWAY, Wash. — Community members who live near Spanaway Lake are expressing concerns about a proposed microhome village that aims to house those who are experiencing homelessness and provide services.</p> <p>The project would ultimately house more than 200 people and would be built on land near Spanaway Loop Road South and Cross Base Highway South (176th Street South). The property will be 85 acres in total, however, only 27 acres of that will be buildable land and it is being called Pierce County Village.</p> <p>The land has not been purchased yet, but officials said it is being finalized.</p> <p>"The County set aside \$22 million for its own community village to help cover the costs of land acquisition, infrastructure, and pre-design, and assumes substantial private and other funding for the construction of microhomes and other structures," Pierce County says on its website.</p> <p>When it is all said and done, around 285 microhomes are expected to be placed on the land, that includes places where staff members can offer supportive service and case management to help those who are homeless who will be living at the village. Officials are hoping construction can start next year. The Tacoma Rescue Mission will handle the operation of the program.</p> <p>However, some are expressing concerns about the project.</p> <p>"The safety you're putting in 250 people that are homeless, possibly have some mental issues," homeowner Debbie Nelson said, "I'm concerned about our safety."</p> <p>Melvin Oleson, a military veteran who lives nearby, said he is concerned about the noise coming from JBLM and how that might affect residents of the village who may suffer from PTSD, like he does. "Even now I still feel the impact of the airplanes flying over, the artillery, the machine guns, all of this going on, and they're a lot closer," Oleson said.</p> <p>There are also environmental concerns related to putting this sizable project in the area.</p> <p>Heather Moss, the Pierce County director of Human Services said they will be able to handle the project and addressed some of the safety concerns.</p> <p>"The Tacoma Rescue Mission has been working pretty extensively on a security plan to not only protect the residents who live there, but to protect the neighbors as well," Moss said, "I think one of the reasons that people have this concern is that they see and experience, we've all seen and experienced, some of the criminal activity that happens as a result of the unsanctioned camps that are positioned across our county, this is not that same population."</p> <p>Tacoma Rescue Mission officials sent KOMO News a statement saying in part: <i>We fully hear and understand many of the valid concerns presented by our neighbors. Our goal at this time is to work with our Pierce County elected officials to find solutions for some of the most pressing needs in our community. The Pierce County Village project is one possible solution that we believe can greatly benefit many residents in our county, including Spanaway. There are several</i></p>

	<i>questions which we continue to explore as this project develops and we look forward to further communication and dialogue with the community at large as this project unfolds.</i>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Governor pitches \$4B homeless proposal
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-state-governor-jay-inslee-lawmakers-legislative-session-homeless-housing-police-department-funding-camp-tent-encampment-christine-rolfes-drew-stokesbary#
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee suggested Thursday the state can't continue to allow people to camp next to playgrounds or squat near freeways for much longer.</p> <p>In his annual meeting with reporters ahead of the legislative session, Inslee suggested there had been “progress” in relocating homeless people who have congregated near I-5 and state highways, backed by millions in funds. But he said more is needed to permanently house people living in “squalor.”</p> <p>The comments were part of his pitch for a new \$4 billion proposal for housing and homelessness, which will now be the key issue when the annual legislative session begins on Monday.</p> <p>Inslee told reporters his proposal, if approved by the legislature and voters, would build supportive housing and clear rights-of-way, while also building emergency permanent supportive housing, people with chronic mental illness, and new diversion centers. He also made the argument that the money would help boost housing supply and lower the cost of rent and prices.</p> <p>The issue is still among the tops for voters, according to multiple polls in recent years.</p> <p>Public safety also scores highly. Inslee and lawmakers spoke Thursday about likely competing bills to boost police department hiring. Inslee admitted that crime is on the rise in Washington state. He hinted that he supports Democratic proposals to boost spending on training, including building at least one other training facility in Washington state.</p> <p>Rep. Drew Stokesbary (R) of Auburn said he will also pitch a package that involves offering grants to local municipalities for officer hiring and perhaps a local tax credit for cities who choose to spend money on the issue. Senator Christine Rolfes (D) of Bainbridge, who chairs the Senate Ways and Means Committee, suggested there will be a “menu of options” to increase police hiring during the session.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Temporary Russian ceasefire begins
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-01-06/russia-christmas-truce-ukraine-uncertain
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — The viability of Russian President Vladimir Putin's order for his forces to observe a unilateral 36-hour cease-fire was in doubt Friday after Ukrainian officials dismissed the move as a ploy without clarifying whether their own troops would hold fire.</p> <p>Moscow also did not say whether it would hit back if Ukraine kept fighting.</p> <p>The Russian-declared truce, in observance of Orthodox Christmas, began at noon Friday and was to continue through midnight Saturday night Moscow time (1 a.m. Friday to 1 p.m. Saturday PT). There were no immediate reports of it being broken.</p> <p>Air-raid sirens sounded in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, about 40 minutes after the Russian cease-fire was to come into effect, but no explosions were heard. A widely used app that includes information from emergency services showed sirens blaring across the country.</p> <p>Putin's announcement Thursday that the Kremlin's troops would stop fighting along the nearly 700-mile front line or elsewhere was unexpected. It came after the Russian Orthodox Church head, Patriarch Kirill,</p>

proposed a cease-fire for this weekend's Orthodox Christmas holiday. The Orthodox Church, which uses the Julian calendar, celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7.

Ukrainian and Western officials suspected an ulterior motive in Putin's apparent goodwill gesture.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky questioned the Kremlin's intentions, accusing it of planning the pause in fighting in order "to continue the war with renewed vigor."

"Now they want to use Christmas as a cover to stop the [advance of our guys in the Donbas](#) for a while and bring equipment, ammunition and mobilized people closer to our positions," Zelensky said late Thursday, referring to the industrial heartland of eastern Ukraine.

Zelensky did not, however, state outright that Kyiv would ignore Putin's request.

President Biden echoed Zelensky's wariness, saying it was "interesting" that Putin was ready to bomb hospitals, nurseries and churches on the Dec. 25 Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

"I think [Putin] is [trying to find some oxygen](#)," Biden said, without elaborating.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Washington had "little faith in the intentions behind this announcement," adding that Kremlin officials "have given us no reason to take anything that they offer at face value."

The truce order seems to be a ploy "to rest, refit, regroup and ultimately re-attack," he said.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War agreed that the truce could be a maneuver to [allow Russia to regroup](#).

"Such a pause would disproportionately benefit Russian troops and begin to deprive Ukraine of the initiative," the think tank said late Thursday. "Putin cannot reasonably expect Ukraine to meet the terms of this suddenly declared cease-fire and may have called for the cease-fire to frame Ukraine as unaccommodating and unwilling to take the necessary steps toward negotiations."

Washington says it is prepared to keep backing Ukraine's war effort. The U.S. is due to announce Friday nearly [\\$3 billion in military aid for Ukraine](#) — a massive new package expected for the first time include several dozen Bradley fighting vehicles.

The ill-feeling between the warring sides showed no signs of abating, despite the backdrop of Christmas. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council, said those who rejected Putin's proposal for a Christmas truce were "clowns" and "pigs."

"The hand of Christian mercy was extended to the Ukrainians," he said in a Telegram post. "But pigs have no faith and no innate sense of gratitude."

Some civilians on the streets of Kyiv said they [spoke from bitter experience](#) in doubting Russia's motives.

"Everybody is preparing [for an attack], because everybody remembers what happened on the New Year when there were around 40 Shahed [Iranian drones]," resident Vasyl Kuzmenko said. "But everything is possible."

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HEADLINE	01/05 New Covid variant spreads rapidly NY, NJ
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/health/cdc-new-covid-variant-xbb-1-5-spreading-rapidly-in-ny-nj-as-cases-hospitalizations-rise/4030413/

GIST

A new [most transmissible-yet COVID variant](#) has established dominance in the New York area, fueling rising infection rates across the five boroughs as a [looming nurses' strike](#) and ongoing concerns about [RSV](#) in kids stoke fresh anxiety about the years-long pandemic.

That XBB.1.5 strain, another omicron descendant, is a [highly](#) contagious "recombinant" one spawned from two prior, and different omicron subvariants. Those two were considered more transmissible than their predecessors at the time they emerged, and the resulting fusion -- XBB.1.5 -- is believed to be that much more potent in terms of infectiousness.

At this point, the World Health Organization doesn't have any data to indicate it is more lethal or causes more severe cases, but the rate at which it is spreading, especially in the northeastern United States, is raising some questions.

Global health officials are worried about the rapid spread rate -- the number of people infected with XBB.1.5 has been doubling in the U.S. about every two weeks -- [according to WHO COVID-19 Technical Lead Maria VanKerkhove](#).

"It is the most transmissible subvariant that has been detected yet," she told reporters this week. "The more this virus circulates, the more opportunities it will have to change."

And nowhere is XBB.1.5 circulating faster than the northeast, according to CDC data. Its latest update estimates the variant's prevalence in the New York region, which also encompasses New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, to be 72.2% but as high as 80.8%, compared with a 40.5% estimated prevalence and 61% high at the national level.

The CDC's Connecticut region, which also includes Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont, most of which typically reported lower than national average viral rates through the pandemic, has a slightly higher prevalence. The agency estimates XBB.1.5 could account for up to 86.2% of COVID virus circulating there.

The data are current only through New Year's Eve, meaning the numbers should rise across the board when the CDC next updates its variant data on Friday.

In New York City, [health department data](#) shows the rolling case average has fallen from its recent high in early December but is holding at a higher rate than city officials would likely prefer. Current numbers are around where they were in August in terms of new cases. COVID-related hospitalizations and deaths rose this winter in accordance with the case spike, but [city health data shows both lines plunging in recent weeks](#) as patients are discharged and recover.

At the state level, Gov. Kathy Hochul's latest COVID update puts the rolling positivity rate at 8.7%, the highest it's been since August. [Breakthrough case rates](#) have stabilized, but [reinfection rates](#), especially among the unvaccinated and on Long Island, are rising. Hospitalizations have also been climbing, with Hochul reporting a statewide total of 4,350 as of Wednesday, an increase of nearly 390 over the prior day. More than 400 of those patients are in intensive care units.

The rolling hospitalization rate of 22.26 per 100,000 residents in the state's latest report is the highest it's been since February, [health department data show](#).

Overall, though, the majority of all patients hospitalized with COVID in the state (54.8%) did not have the virus included as one of the reasons for admission. In other words, it was non-severe enough to be detected only via routine testing.

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HEADLINE 01/06 Hyperactive storm train to keep slamming

SOURCE	https://www.accuweather.com/en/winter-weather/hyperactive-pacific-storm-train-to-keep-slamming-california/1451070
GIST	<p>Deadly storms unleashed fierce back-to-back blows to California at the end of 2022 and the start of 2023, and AccuWeather meteorologists warn that a series of storms lining up across the Pacific Ocean will continue to aim for the Golden State with rounds of heavy rain and mountain snow. The dangers of flooding and mudslides will increase with each passing storm.</p> <p>The atmosphere has flipped the switch to storm mode as the weather pattern through mid-month has the potential to unleash more than a foot of additional rain in some locations and many more yards of snow over the high country of the Sierra Nevada.</p> <p>"Factoring in the storms that began in late December forward through mid-January, rainfall and mountain snow in some areas could rival amounts that do not occur, on average, for 25 or 50 years or more," AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Mike Doll said.</p> <p>A couple of upcoming rounds, in particular, have drawn the attention of AccuWeather forecasters.</p> <p>"After a couple of weak storms [relatively speaking] this weekend, a bigger storm will arrive early next week and then another big storm the following week," AccuWeather Lead Long-Range Meteorologist Paul Pastelok said.</p> <p>The impacts from these upcoming big storms will be to unleash new rounds of torrential rain, flash flooding and mudslides, as well as tremendous, road-clogging snow and avalanche danger over the Sierra Nevada.</p> <p>Surging water levels on area streams and rivers are likely to lead to flooding in unprotected areas. Rising waters will test levee systems and dam spillway capabilities.</p> <p>The storm from Sunday night to Tuesday has the potential to be the biggest of the bunch in terms of the amount of rain that could be focused on central portions of California. That storm is likely to bring higher snow levels when compared to the storm into Thursday and the storms this weekend. The higher snow levels may unleash more of a combination of heavy rain and melting snow at intermediate elevations of the Sierra Nevada, which may then surge into San Joaquin and Sacramento Valley streams and rivers.</p> <p>"Along with the ongoing risk of life-threatening incidents from flash flooding and mudslides for each storm, the potential for a catastrophic flood event will increase as the stormy pattern continues," AccuWeather Chief Meteorologist Jon Porter said.</p> <p>As the ground remains saturated during the pattern, rounds of strong winds can cause some trees to topple over. The strong wind gusts can lead to periodic and widespread power outages.</p> <p>The impact on airline travel alone from the storms on the major hubs of San Francisco and Los Angeles can have substantial ripple effects across the United States and the globe as crews and aircraft are displaced. The combination of heavy rain, low cloud ceilings, poor visibility and strong winds can lead to lengthy ground stops.</p> <p>Meanwhile, motorists are strongly urged not to drive through flooded roads as the water may be deeper than it appears, and in some cases, the road surface may have been completely washed away beneath floodwaters, AccuWeather forecasters say. Traveling along winding, secondary roads in hilly areas could be hazardous due to flash flooding and debris flows.</p> <p>How long will the stormy pattern persist in the West?</p> <p>"The energy for the storm train started over Asia several weeks ago, expanded over the Pacific in late December and has now gotten the subtropical part of the jet stream involved," Pastelok said. It is the subtropical branch of the jet stream that helps transport mega moisture into the storm and onshore along</p>

the Pacific coast. The subtropical jet stream branch is a major contributor to atmospheric rivers that can lead to a firehose effect of torrential rain and mountain snow.

"This setup will continue until around Jan. 16 or 17 for California," Pastelok said.

Around that time frame, the storms will tend to swing to the north and farther inland. When that happens, precipitation amounts will tend to dwindle in California but can ramp up more so over the interior West, and that could impact the Colorado River basin with more significant precipitation events.

"During the latter half of January, there should be a break off from the subtropical moisture at the very least," Pastelok said.

Last January, Mother Nature completely shut off the atmospheric faucet in California.

For example, at San Francisco, only 0.07 of an inch of rain fell from Jan. 5 through April 10, 2022, compared to an average of 10.71 inches. Meanwhile, Tahoe City, California, located in the Sierra Nevada, received only about 1 inch of snow during the same period, compared to an average of 116 inches.

But, this year will play out in a different way than last year when the storm train suddenly and completely ended for much of California. During the period from Oct. 1, 2021, through Jan. 5, 2022, San Francisco picked up 16.70 inches of rain. Even though San Francisco is behind the prior year's blistering pace by more than 3 inches at this point of the season, more rain is coming through the winter and into the spring.

"Storms are likely to resume during February and March, just probably not to the magnitude as is occurring now and what is likely to continue through mid-January," Pastelok said. "There should be a much better outcome in terms of drought relief with rain and mountain snow this winter, compared to last winter."

Unlike last winter, there should not be a massive warmup and dryness lasting months from the winter through the spring that caused the ground to become parched, reservoirs to evaporate and mountain snow to disappear before melting and running off into area streams and rivers.

However, in areas east of the Sierra Nevada, such as the Colorado Basin and perhaps in Southern California, it may be harder to completely alleviate the drought that has been underway for the past decade, he cautioned.

Snow cleaning crews may struggle to find time to keep roads open over the Sierra Nevada passes due to the frequency of the storms and the heavy snow each will bring.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Hawaii's Kilauea volcano erupts again
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/hawaiis-kilauea-volcano-erupts-rcna64568
GIST	<p>Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, began erupting again in Hawaii on Thursday, nearly a month after federal officials said activity there had ceased.</p> <p>The U.S. Geological Survey said webcam images showed lava flow within the Halema'uma'u crater in the volcano's summit caldera.</p> <p>The agency upgraded the volcano's alert level from watch to warning and said it was evaluating possible hazards. So far the eruption has been contained to the crater, it said.</p> <p>The volcano, in Volcanoes National Park on Hawaii's Big Island, has been erupting often since 1983.</p> <p>In 2018, an eruption from fissures in its lower East Rift Zone covered 13 square miles with lava, destroying 700 homes and other buildings.</p>

	<p>Most recently, Kilauea erupted between September 2021 and last month.</p> <p>In November, another eruption on Hawaii's Big Island — from Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano — came after a series of large earthquakes. It was its first eruption in 38 years.</p> <p>A month later, the USGS's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said Mauna Loa's eruptions had ceased.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Putin-ally seeks Ukraine mineral wealth
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/putin-ally-fighting-to-control-salt-and-gypsum-mines-near-ukraine-city-of-bakhmut-says-us
GIST	<p>A close ally of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, is interested in taking control of salt and gypsum from mines near the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, according to a White House official.</p> <p>Yevgeny Prigozhin is the founder of Russia's most powerful mercenary force, the Wagner Group. Wagner has played a key role in the Russian offensive against Bakhmut.</p> <p>There were indications that monetary motives were driving Russia's and Prigozhin's "obsession" with Bakhmut, the US official said.</p> <p>The United States has previously accused Russian mercenaries of exploiting natural resources in Central African Republic, Mali, Sudan and elsewhere to help fund Moscow's war in Ukraine – a charge Russia rejected as "anti-Russian rage".</p> <p>In a video released over new year, Prigozhin was filmed visiting a basement near Bakhmut filled with the bodies of his fighters, many of them convicts, who had been killed during the bitter fighting for the city, a key Russian objective since the summer.</p> <p>Prigozhin has said his fighters have sometimes spent weeks attempting to capture a single house in Bakhmut.</p> <p>Last month, Ukrainian troops fighting in the area told the Guardian that the eastern city lacked any obvious strategic value and questioned why Russia was so focused on what Prigozhin himself dubbed the "Bakhmut meat grinder".</p> <p>"The only strategy I can see at this point is that they want to take the city so they can claim some kind of victory after a year that has seen so many losses," said Sasha, a member of Ukraine's 24th mechanised brigade.</p> <p>"We've noticed in the past two weeks an increase in shelling and infantry attacks as if they are in a rush to take Bakhmut. That also means that they are suffering ever greater losses. They are just throwing in meat."</p> <p>Out of its force of nearly 50,000 mercenaries, Wagner has sustained more than 4,100 deaths and 10,000 wounded, including over 1,000 killed between late November and early December near Bakhmut, the US official said on Thursday.</p> <p>The White House said late last month that the Wagner Group took delivery of an arms shipment from North Korea to help bolster Russian forces in Ukraine, a sign of the group's expanding role in the conflict.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Anxious travel for lunar new year in China
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/anxious-lunar-new-year-in-china-as-millions-travel-while-covid-spreads

Dora Wang* longs to see her family over lunar new year, but despite the recent scrapping of Covid travel restrictions across [China](#) she has decided against travelling the 286 miles (461km) from Beijing to her home city, Dalian, in the north-east.

“I am really worried because the train stations will be packed,” said the 31-year-old illustrator, who is five months pregnant. Not having been vaccinated, the expectant mother is concerned that she might catch Covid during the long journey.

“Even though my parents have recovered from Covid, there are now so many variants out there I worry that I might catch it,” she said.

The holiday travel season starts around now, two weeks before China’s most important holiday, the lunar new year, on 22 January. Similarly to Christmas in the west, people traditionally return to their home towns to celebrate with family.

But this year, after China effectively abandoned its zero-Covid policy amid a surge in case numbers, there are widespread worries that the lunar new year rush could fuel even more rapid transmission of Covid, particularly in rural areas where there are fewer medical facilities and health workers, and less medicine and money for care.

Wang’s sentiments are shared by many Chinese residents. After years of family separation under lockdowns and harsh internal travel restrictions, many people are eager to be reunited with their loved ones but are also anxious about catching Covid.

“New year is coming and ... many are travelling home, but we’re bracing for more chaos. Many are sick with fever. Hospitals and pharmacies are overwhelmed. The experts say everyone can go home for the new year, but how can we not prepare for another massive outbreak?” one person wrote online.

Those living outside mainland China are reluctant to return home while expats living in China are avoiding going home in case they might spread Covid.

“There is a huge outbreak on the mainland now and if I get infected while being back home, I won’t be able to return for the new term,” said a Chinese student studying in Hong Kong.

For some though, the chance to see family after almost three years of enforced separation is worth the risk. “I’m not very worried about the risks of getting Covid. I feel it’s just a matter of time,” said Mei who works in Beijing but has booked a flight back to Taipei in mid-January.

Mei is planning an overseas trip with her partner, but they are struggling with their options as many countries have imposed restrictions or requirements for tourists coming from China. “We’ll have to wait and see where we can travel to,” Mei added.

China’s wave of Covid infections is [overwhelming hospitals and intensive care units in many cities](#). The next wave of infections is likely to hit rural areas and could affect even more people than the wave racing through cities now, the British health analytics company Airfinity has warned. It estimates that about 9,000 people a day are dying from Covid in China and the figure could rise to as many as 25,000 a day this month, while the total death toll could reach 1.7 million by April.

Chinese people have turned to the internet to find out how to avoid being infected. Some experts have advised driving instead of taking public transport. One post contained a long list of “must dos” before travelling, including getting oneself and family members vaccinated and travelling only after a negative PCR test.

The “must bring” list includes a supply of N95 masks, surgical spirits, a thermometer and pulse oximeters as well as waterproof jackets and plastic bags for keeping train tickets and ID cards clean. The post also

advises changing masks frequently, avoiding waiting in crowded places and disinfecting oneself and luggage before greeting family members.

Ji Ka, an opinion leader with 12 million followers on social media platform Sina Weibo, addressed his fans, saying “many of you must be worried, like me ... whether they will catch [Covid] or infect their families”. In a video interview with Zeng Guang, a former chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Zeng advised people to avoid travelling within two weeks of Covid recovery and to cancel trips if there was an outbreak in their home towns.

China’s cabinet said on Wednesday it would step up medicine distribution and meet the demand from health institutions, nursing homes and rural areas during the lunar new year, state media reported.

China has moved to a [narrower definition of Covid deaths](#). Funeral homes and hospitals say they are overwhelmed, but the authorities have reported five or fewer deaths a day since the end of the zero-Covid restrictions. [The World Health Organization has warned](#) that official statistics are not showing the true impact.

The government’s abrupt shift in Covid messaging – from a lethal, deadly virus to “just a little worse than a cold” – has also stoked cynicism, with many ordinary Chinese saying they no longer believe in the state’s reassurance that travelling is safe.

“Look after yourself and don’t believe a word from these so-called (state-affiliated) ‘experts’!” said one post on Sina Weibo.

“We only have ourselves to rely on now. Pray for your luck!” said another.

**Name has been changed*

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HEADLINE	01/05 US, Saudi tensions ease, Iran concern rises
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-saudi-tensions-ease-as-concerns-about-iran-grow-11672927633?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>The Biden administration has dropped threats to retaliate against Saudi Arabia for an oil-production cut last year and is moving to step up security coordination to counter Iran in 2023, U.S. and Saudi officials said, three months after ties hit a historic low point.</p> <p>Officials pointed to signs of improved U.S.-Saudi cooperation in recent weeks as falling U.S. gasoline prices, better-than-expected midterm election results for Democrats, and heightened concerns about Iran take the edge off a long-simmering spat that spilled into the open in October when the Saudis rebuffed White House requests to delay the production cut. The output decision fueled inflation fears just a month before the midterms, and President Biden vowed to work with Congress to impose unspecified “consequences” on Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>Now, Biden administration officials say there are no plans to follow through on that threat. Instead, officials from both countries say they pressing ahead with new military and intelligence projects and sensitive efforts to contain Iran amid stalled efforts to revive the international nuclear deal with Tehran. In December, the Biden administration and Saudi officials worked to derail a bill in Congress that would have cut off the limited intelligence support the U.S. provides to Riyadh for the war in Yemen.</p> <p>In November, the Biden administration told a U.S. court that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s status as a sitting head of government shields him from a civil lawsuit brought by the fiancée of slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. A federal judge agreed, and the suit was dismissed. Prince Mohammed had sought immunity in the aftermath of Mr. Khashoggi’s 2018 killing, which the U.S. intelligence community concluded that the 37-year-old de facto ruler was likely responsible for, an accusation the Saudi government denies.</p>

That same month, the two countries shared intelligence with each other that [Iran was preparing an imminent attack on Saudi Arabia](#) and developed a coordinated response, The Wall Street Journal reported. The U.S. military sent warplanes and bombers toward Iran in separate shows of force meant to deter Tehran. U.S. and Saudi officials said the cooperation was a key turning point in relations after the October rift.

“We think the combination of that rapid intelligence sharing and repositioning [of military assets] is what backed the Iranians off,” said Colin Kahl, the Pentagon undersecretary of defense for policy.

Officials also pointed to sustained military cooperation that helped carry the political relationship through months of upheaval. For example, Saudi jet fighters escorted long-range U.S. bombers through their national airspace several times last year in exercises carried out with other countries allied with Washington, including Israel.

The U.S. is working closely with Saudi Arabia, Israel and other Middle Eastern nations to develop new coordinated air-defense systems and expanded cooperation at sea to deter Iran.

“It’s imperative to build strong partnerships,” said Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich, who commands the U.S. Air Force in the Middle East. “That keeps this key terrain secure and in our camp on the side of the liberal international order that’s been in place since World War II.”

In response to questions about the Saudi relationship, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. would “continue to assess relations with Saudi Arabia methodically and strategically, and in line with what’s in our interests.”

At a December news conference, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said, “We will continue to have a very strong bridge with the U.S. across the board, both in security and political affairs.”

The emerging Saudi-U.S. thaw comes as the Biden administration looks to reshape the U.S. military presence in the Middle East by stitching together a security umbrella stretching from Israel through the Persian Gulf. Concerns about Iran have grown since Russia began using [Iranian-made drones to attack Ukraine](#), with the White House warning that the two American adversaries are developing a full-scale military partnership.

The Saudi and U.S. officials caution that the relationship remains shaky and could rupture again. Prince Mohammed has charted a more independent foreign policy, and good relations with U.S. rivals like China and Russia are strategically important to Riyadh. At the same time, the Biden administration remains intent on focusing its firepower on Russia and China, and not the Middle East.

The U.S. dependency on its military relationship with Saudi Arabia has limitations. The U.S. once regularly deployed an aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf in a display of its military commitment to the region’s security but hasn’t in 15 months, instead sending tankers and jet fighters.

Any emerging rapprochement doesn’t yet extend to Saudi decision-making on oil, which the kingdom’s officials have said they are making for their own national interests in a departure from the decades-old understanding that U.S. security guarantees would ensure a relatively low crude price.

Saudi Arabia still faces a backlash from lawmakers who want to block future U.S. arms sales. An early 2023 test on Capitol Hill could be the confirmation process for a new U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia after Mr. Biden’s nominee was held up last year.

Rep. Sean Casten (D, Ill.), co-author of an unsuccessful bill introduced after the Saudi oil-output cut that would have removed U.S. troops and air defenses from Saudi Arabia, said the U.S. still needs to “reevaluate the relationship and accelerate our turn to clean, domestically-produced energy.”

	<p>Saudi officials said the production cut was essential for their own economy and rejected any suggestion that they were aiding Russia, which also cut production as part of a 23-nation coalition known as OPEC+. While oil prices rose after the decision, they eventually eased toward the end of the year on global recession fears.</p> <p>A focal point for continued U.S.-Saudi military cooperation is the Prince Sultan Air Base, a desert outpost south of Riyadh that consists of temporary buildings and tents. The Biden administration officials resisted pulling Patriot missiles from this Saudi base, saying they are essential for protecting U.S. forces who reside there.</p> <p>Saudi jet fighters flew missions last year escorting long-range U.S. bombers through their national airspace, helping the American military project power across the Middle East. The B-52 escorts were run partially out of the Prince Sultan Air Base weeks before and after the October OPEC+ decision. They are expected to continue this year.</p> <p>These routine training missions help both sides with “the basic blocking and tackling” of air operations, said Tracy Jones, the air force’s deputy director for security cooperation in the Middle East. “Our readiness to execute that mission has not changed,” he said. “It’s become more complex.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 State Capitol briefly evacuated
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3769750/state-capitol-building-briefly-evacuated-ahead-legislative-session/
GIST	<p>The Washington State Capitol Building was evacuated after a fire alarm went off during discussions of what priorities party leadership has for the upcoming legislative session.</p> <p>According to KIRO Newsradio correspondent Matt Markovich, the fire alarm in the Cherberg building at the state capital went off, causing the removal of all press and legislative leadership gathered.</p> <p>Update (10:15 a.m.): Both reporters and legislative members have returned inside the building</p> <p>The Washington state legislature is set to be back in regular session Monday, Jan. 9.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Judge upholds W. Va. female sports law
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/5/federal-judge-hands-defeat-transgender-athletes-up/
GIST	<p>A federal judge upheld Thursday a 2021 West Virginia law barring biological males from girls’ and women’s sports, ruling that the state legislature has the authority to issue definitions of sex, in a victory for advocates of female sports.</p> <p>U.S. District Court Judge Joseph R. Goodwin ruled in favor of the state in its defense of House Bill 2393, called the Save Women’s Sports Bill, which was challenged by an 11-year-old male-born student called B.P.J. who sought to play on the girls’ track team based on gender identity.</p> <p>Judge Goodwin, an appointee of former President Clinton, said that “a transgender girl is biologically male and, barring medical intervention, would undergo male puberty like other biological males. And biological males generally outperform females athletically.”</p> <p>“The state is permitted to legislate sports rules on this basis because sex, and the physical characteristics that flow from it, are substantially related to athletic performance and fairness in sports,” said Judge Goodwin in the 23-page opinion.</p> <p>West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrissey cheered the court’s ruling, the first federal decision in the litigation against state laws preventing male-born athletes from competing against females in scholastic sports.</p>

Eighteen states have passed such bills in the last few years.

“This is not only about simple biology, but fairness for women’s sports, plain and simple,” Mr. Morrissey said. “Opportunities for girls and women on the field are precious and we must safeguard that future. Protecting these opportunities is important, because when biological males compete in a women’s event women and girls lose their opportunity to shine.”

Alliance Defending Freedom, which represented a former West Virginia State University women’s soccer player who intervened in the case, called the ruling “a win for reality.”

“The truth matters, and it is crucial that our laws and policies recognize that the physical differences between men and women matter, especially in a context like sports,” Alliance senior counsel Christiana Kiefer said. “Female athletes deserve to compete on a level playing field.”

Attorneys for B.P.J. and mother Heather Jackson argued that the child’s rights were protected under Title IX, which bars discrimination based on sex in education, including scholastic sports, but Judge Goodwin disagreed.

“There is no serious debate that Title IX’s endorsement of sex separation in sports refers to biological sex,” the judge said.

“Nevertheless, B.P.J. argues that transgender girls are similarly situated to cisgender girls, and therefore their exclusion from girls’ teams is unlawful discrimination. But as I have already discussed, transgender girls are biologically male,” Judge Goodwin said.

The West Virginia law defines “biological sex” as “an individual’s physical form as a male or female based solely on the individual’s reproductive biology and genetics at birth.” The law defines “female” and “male” based on an individual’s “biological sex determined at birth.”

B.P.J. began taking puberty blockers after showing signs of male puberty, and argued that she has not gained the physical characteristics associated with superior male performance in athletics, but Judge Goodwin said that’s not always the case with transgender athletes.

“A transgender person may choose to only transition socially, rather than medically. In other words, the social, medical, and physical transition of each transgender person is unique,” the opinion said.

In addition, “there is much debate over whether and to what extent hormone therapies after puberty can reduce a transgender girl’s athletic advantage over cisgender girls.”

Attorneys for B.P.J. said that the law, which was blocked by a temporary injunction shortly after passage, would prevent her from participating in sports at Bridgeport Middle School, an argument rejected by the judge.

“Short of any medical intervention that will differ for each individual person, biological males are not similarly situated to biological females for purposes of athletics,” said Judge Goodwin. “And, despite her repeated argument to the contrary, transgender girls are not excluded from school sports entirely. They are permitted to try out for boys’ teams, regardless of how they express their gender.”

The lawsuit was filed against the West Virginia State Board of Education; the Harrison County Board of Education and superintendent Dora Stutler, and the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission. The state was granted a motion to intervene.

While Mr. Morrissey praised the ruling as a “big win,” the legal landscape on male-to-female transgender athletes in women’s sports remains in flux.

	Last month, the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals threw out a case filed by four former girls' high school track athletes in Connecticut who had challenged the state's policy allowing male-born athletes in female sports.
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HEADLINE	01/05 Major changes to policing in some states
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/5/major-changes-policing-come-some-states-2023/
GIST	<p>With the new year comes a fresh batch of legislation across several states aimed at restricting aggressive policing and cracking down on law enforcement misconduct.</p> <p>Leading the charge is Illinois, where lawmakers passed a Safety, Accountability, Fairness and Equity-Today (SAFE-T) Act that bans chokeholds, requires officers to intervene if they observe a fellow officer using too much force and requires all police departments in the state to use body-worn cameras.</p> <p>The ubiquitous body camera usage also comes with the potential for felony charges if the officers are found to have willfully obstructed justice by tampering with the footage.</p> <p>On the administrative side, a host of new regulations about handling misconduct complaints, creating a decertification process for officers in Illinois and allowing the attorney general to pursue civil litigation against police departments for violating people's rights were all enacted as well.</p> <p>The most contentious element of the SAFE-T Act was its intent to end cashless bail in the state — a provision that the Illinois Supreme Court ruled was unconstitutional hours before the law was set to take effect.</p> <p>The provision would have required judges to determine a defendant's risk to public safety before granting them release.</p> <p>Democrat Don Harmon, the state Senate's president, said in December that ending cash bail was meant to prevent "dangerous people [who] could buy their way out of jail while people accused of non-violent crimes remain detained as they await their day in court simply because they lack resources."</p> <p>On the other side of the aisle, Republican Darren Bailey likewise said last month that "This entire 'SAFE-T' Act package does nothing to hold violent criminals accountable, but instead promotes dangerous activity where victims and innocent people's lives are at risk."</p> <p>Colorado is another state with a big change covering how police carry out their duties.</p> <p>While body cameras and annual reports on police use of force will become the law statewide come July 1, the most significant change is how police can handle protests.</p> <p>Firing less-than-lethal projectiles that target a person's head, pelvis or back, or firing the projectiles indiscriminately into a crowd, will no longer be allowed. The use of pepper spray and tear gas before issuing multiple orders to disperse is also banned.</p> <p>"The majority of the changes in this field have led to second guessing from officers," a member of the Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police said in the 2022 survey of state law enforcement officers in the fall. "That's led to injuries and having to resort to higher levels of force than would've been required on initial contact."</p> <p>California is no longer allowing police to use DNA collected from victims in sexual assault investigations as evidence for later crimes.</p> <p>This came after a San Francisco woman's DNA was used by police five years later to arrest her for an unrelated property crime, according to the Los Angeles Times.</p>

	<p>Not all changes are being met with open arms by politicians.</p> <p>Mayor Muriel Bowser vetoed the D.C. Council’s massive rewrite of the city’s criminal code on Wednesday, saying that it’s too lenient on gun violence offenders.</p> <p>Despite that, the council’s unanimous passage of the code means that it will likely become official later this year. The rewritten code would take effect in October 2025.</p> <p>Elsewhere, multiple states — including Arizona, California, Connecticut and Missouri— now have laws that allow ex-cons to either seal or expunge their criminal records if they avoid any new offenses for a number of years following their release.</p> <p>Michigan and Ohio have similar laws taking effect in April.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 US warship sails thru Taiwan Strait
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/5/us-navy-warship-sails-through-taiwan-strait-amid-r/
GIST	<p>A U.S. Navy warship sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Thursday in what Pentagon officials said was a demonstration of the U.S. commitment to keep the waterway that separates Taiwan from mainland China open to international traffic.</p> <p>The guided-missile destroyer USS Chung Hoon made the passage from the South China Sea north through the 100-mile strait and into the East China Sea, said Navy Lt. Kristina Wiedemann, spokeswoman for the Seventh Fleet.</p> <p>The “freedom of navigation operation” was the Navy’s first through the strait since tensions soared over Christmas weekend when some 71 People’s Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft and seven Chinese navy warships conducted operations around Taiwan, the island democracy Beijing has vowed one day to reclaim.</p> <p>China has been sending up to 10 aircraft into Taiwan’s air defense zone almost daily. The recent escalation was seen as an expression of Beijing’s anger at recent legislation signed by President Biden strengthening U.S.-Taiwan defense ties.</p> <p>The Chung Hoon’s passage also came in the wake of a dangerous PLA air force intercept of a U.S. RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft patrolling over the South China Sea on Dec. 21.</p> <p>A U.S. military RC-135 Rivet Joint reconnaissance aircraft was spotted over the southern Taiwan Strait around the same time as the Chung Hoon, the open-source aircraft tracker Aerospace Intelligence reported on Twitter.</p> <p>The latest destroyer transit was routine and carried out “through waters where high-seas freedoms of navigation and overflight apply in accordance with international law,” Lt. Wiedemann said in a statement.</p> <p>Asked if the destroyer was challenged by Chinese navy ships or aircraft, the spokeswoman indicated there were exchanges but provided no details.</p> <p>“All interactions with foreign military forces during the transit were consistent with international norms and did not impact the operation,” she said. “U.S. Navy vessels routinely interact with foreign warships and aircraft while operating throughout the region.”</p> <p>China in the past has hailed U.S. warships and aircraft in areas that it claims are its territory and demanded they depart the area.</p>

In addition to its stepped-up aerial and naval operations near Taiwan in recent months, China escalated the standoff in June by declaring the Taiwan Strait to be part of its sovereign territory. The Chinese Foreign Ministry announced June 13 that China “has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait” and denied other nations from declaring the waterway as international waters.

The State Department rejected the Chinese claim and said the strait remains international waters governed by high seas freedoms, including vessel and aircraft transit.

Critics said the Chinese declaration on the Taiwan Strait violated long-standing diplomatic understandings with the U.S. designed to preserve a fragile status quo that has kept peace across the strait for decades. Lt. Wiedemann sought to play down the latest transit and the destroyer’s interaction with the PLA.

“U.S. Navy ships use the Taiwan Strait to transit between the [South China and East China Seas] and have done so for many years,” she said.

A Chinese Embassy spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The passage comes even as the Biden administration is easing recent bilateral tensions with China over fears that sour relations will lead to war.

The last warship to transit the Taiwan Strait on Nov. 5 was the guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold. That passage was kept secret and not disclosed until after President Biden met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Bali on Nov. 20 on the sidelines of the G-20 summit. The meeting set the stage for a new Biden policy of conciliation toward China.

Separately, Taiwan’s government announced Thursday that four current and four former military officers were detained on suspicion of spying for China. The officers included a former air force captain and three active-duty military officers.

Taiwan remains a major espionage target for Chinese intelligence services, U.S. officials have said. In June, a retired Taiwanese general and colonel were indicted for spying for China.

The arrests appear to be part of a stepped-up counterintelligence push by Taiwan against Chinese espionage.

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HEADLINE	01/05 US begins Covid testing of more travelers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/5/as-covid-surges-in-china-us-begins-testing-more-tr/
GIST	<p>NEWARK, N.J. — Shubham Chandra knows how dangerous the coronavirus can be: He lost his dad during the pandemic. So when he cleared customs at Newark Liberty International Airport and saw people offering anonymous COVID-19 testing, he was happy to volunteer.</p> <p>“It’s a minimum amount of effort to help a lot of people,” said the 27-year-old New York City man, who had just stepped off a plane from Cancun, Mexico.</p> <p>The airport testing is part of the government’s early warning system for detecting new variants, which began expanding recently in the wake of a COVID-19 surge in China.</p> <p>With the addition of Los Angeles and Seattle, there are now seven airports where arriving passengers can volunteer for COVID-19 tests. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program now covers about 500 flights from at least 30 countries, including more than half from China and surrounding areas.</p> <p>As of Thursday, the CDC is also requiring travelers to the U.S. from China, Hong Kong and Macao to take a COVID-19 test no more than two days before travel and provide a negative result before boarding a flight.</p>

And down the road, some scientists are calling for wider use of an additional strategy: screening wastewater from toilet tanks on arriving airplanes.

“Without surveillance, it’s very hard to know what’s going on,” said Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University. “Hopefully, with more sampling, we will get more information about what’s circulating.”

Some scientists are worried the COVID-19 surge in China could unleash a new coronavirus mutant on the world, since every infection is another chance for the virus to change. There’s no sign of a new variant from China at this point. But one reason for new testing requirements, according to the CDC, is a lack of adequate and transparent information from China on viral strains infecting people there.

“We have very little control over what happens elsewhere,” said epidemiologist Katelyn Jetelina, a consultant to the CDC. “What we can control is what’s happening in the United States.”

The airport program is based on an unfortunate reality: “Travelers ... go across the globe quickly and they can get and spread infectious diseases really fast,” said Dr. Cindy Friedman, chief of CDC’s travelers’ health branch.

Friedman said the program is a partnership with two companies that take care of the testing and lab work - XpresCheck and Concentric by Ginkgo. A pilot program was expanded around the time the first omicron variant emerged in the U.S. more than a year ago. Besides Newark, Seattle and Los Angeles, the program includes New York’s Kennedy, Washington’s Dulles and airports in Atlanta and San Francisco.

The latest expansion of the traveler surveillance program aims to capture more flights from China. But on Wednesday in Newark, some of the targeted planes arrived from Mexico, France and Belgium. After clearing customs, travelers could stop at a table, swab their noses and fill out a form. Chandra said it took about a minute.

Like other travelers, he won’t get the results. But he tests for COVID-19 when he flies to Ohio every other month to see his mom, he said, since “the last thing I want to do is bring (the virus) home to her.”

About 10% of people on targeted flights volunteer. Their samples are pooled and PCR tested. Positive ones are genetically sequenced. Volunteers get free home COVID-19 tests.

Over time, Friedman expects the program to grow and potentially go global. It’s already shown it can spot coronavirus variants early - detecting omicron variants BA.2 and BA.3 and reporting them to a global database weeks before others did.

But Jetelina said a surveillance program at seven airports is “just not that big” so trying to spot variants might be like “looking for a needle in the haystack.”

To aid the search, experts suggest taking more samples from airplane bathrooms.

“It’s a little gross when you start thinking about it,” Jetelina said. “But these are really long flights and we would expect the majority of people would go to the bathroom.”

The CDC, which monitors wastewater in municipal systems, ran a pilot program last summer testing airplane wastewater at Kennedy airport. Friedman said the agency is working to expand this type of surveillance.

Such testing has been used elsewhere. A study last year in the journal *Environment International* looked at wastewater testing from 37 flights chartered to bring Australians home earlier in the pandemic, concluding that the practice “can provide an additional and effective tool” for monitoring the virus coming into a

	<p>country. Recently, Canada announced an expanded wastewater pilot program and Belgium said it would test wastewater from airplanes coming from China.</p> <p>As surveillance continues, scientists believe that the omicron variant BF.7, which is extremely adept at evading immunity, is driving China's current surge. CDC data shows BF.7 is already in the U.S., and currently accounts for about 2% of COVID-19 cases. The most prevalent mutant in the U.S. is XBB.1.5, another variant responsible for 41% of U.S. cases. Ray said this one attaches more tightly than its competitors to a receptor that allows viruses to enter a cell.</p> <p>Scientists said the virus will surely keep evolving - which is why they need to keep searching for new variants. The coronavirus is like a predator stalking humanity, Ray said, and "the predator adapts to the prey."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Doubts in China on official Covid death toll
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/china-covid-wave-of-celebrity-deaths-sparks-concern-over-actual-death-toll
GIST	<p>A spate of deaths among celebrities and public figures across China has sparked concerns that the actual death toll from Covid-19 may be far higher than authorities are reporting.</p> <p>Many on Chinese social media have been mourning the death of actor Gong Jintang, who died aged 83 on New Year's Day. He was known for his portrayal of Father Kang in the sitcom Kang's Family, which first aired in 2000.</p> <p>Gong, who had been a household name for years in China, had his death reported by local media, but the cause of death was unclear.</p> <p>"I'm so upset. [Gong] represents our memory for two generations," one person said on Weibo, the Chinese microblogging platform.</p> <p>Last month, Beijing opera fans were shocked by the sudden passing of Chu Lanlan, a 40-year-old soprano who performed during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. An obituary released by Beijing Opera Arts College said that Chu, who taught at the institution, died of illness. Her family said they were saddened by her death, but did not elaborate on its cause, local media reported.</p> <p>China last month relaxed its zero-Covid restrictions, leading to a surge in infections, with hospitals and crematoriums quickly overwhelmed.</p> <p>In late December, China's National Health Commission stopped publishing daily Covid data. The World Health Organization earlier this week criticised China's "very narrow" definition of Covid deaths, warning that official statistics were not showing the true impact of the outbreak.</p> <p>China has recorded only 22 Covid deaths since December and has dramatically narrowed the criteria for classifying such fatalities, meaning that Beijing's own statistics about the unprecedented wave are now widely seen as not reflecting reality.</p> <p>The recent deaths of public figures like Gong and Chu has led many in China to question official Covid data.</p> <p>Under a Weibo hashtag that reads "the first Covid wave did not cause a massive amount of deaths", which refers to a December quote from a Chinese health official, many Chinese internet users angrily questioned what they called a huge underestimate in the death toll. The hashtag had more than 220m views by Friday afternoon.</p>

	<p>“Whether it is academicians or celebrities ... or my relatives and friends in close contact, I really feel many people have died, but experts keep saying that was not the case,” one person commented.</p> <p>Another user said: “I beg those adults who can’t see the ants on the ground to see how many people have passed away due to Covid. Just how many people who have great contributions to the country have died? And these were all celebrities.”</p> <p>Wang Jingguang, an award-winning film director best known for his 2013 movie Never Come Back, was also among the recent deaths, dying last month aged 54.</p> <p>Ni Zhen, an 84-year-old renowned Chinese scriptwriter, died last month. Ni was known for writing the classic 1991 film Raise the Red Lantern.</p> <p>Retired soccer star Wang Ruoji was also among the deaths last month. Chinese state media reported that Wang died of Covid at the age of 37.</p> <p>“Many public figures have died, with many of them passing at a young age,” Weibo influencer Haishang Yilanghua, who has 364,000 followers, wrote last month. “These deaths were made public, but there were still many other ordinary people who suffered and died that was not posted online.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Day 317 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-317-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has rejected out of hand a Russian order for a truce over Orthodox Christmas, saying it was a trick to halt the progress of Ukraine’s forces in the eastern Donbas region and bring in more of their own. Speaking pointedly in Russian and addressing both the Kremlin and Russians as a whole on Thursday, Zelenskiy said Moscow had repeatedly ignored Kyiv’s own peace plan. • The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, instructed his defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, to introduce a 36-hour ceasefire along the entire line of contact in Ukraine from noon on Friday to midnight on 7 January, the Kremlin said. Russian troops must hold fire for 36 hours in order to allow people “in the areas of hostilities” to mark Orthodox Christmas, Putin said. • The war would end, Zelenskiy said, when Russian troops left Ukraine or were thrown out. “They now want to use Christmas as a cover, albeit briefly, to stop the advances of our boys in Donbas and bring equipment, ammunitions and mobilised troops closer to our positions,” the Ukrainian leader said in his nightly video address. “What will that give them? Only yet another increase in their total losses.” He said the war “will end either when your soldiers leave or we throw them out”. • The US state department expressed skepticism over Putin’s announced ceasefire, describing it as “cynical” given Moscow’s New Year’s Day attack on Ukraine and saying the US had “little faith” in the announcement’s intentions. • Putin’s announcement came hours after the head of the Russian Orthodox church, Patriarch Kirill, called for a ceasefire and a Christmas truce in Ukraine. In a statement, Kirill said he appealed to “all parties involved in the internecine conflict” for the ceasefire, so that “Orthodox people can attend services on Christmas Eve and the day of the Nativity of Christ”. • Germany will join the US in supplying an additional Patriot air defence battery to Ukraine, the White House has announced, after the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, and the US president, Joe Biden, spoke by phone. The two leaders “expressed their common determination to continue to provide the necessary financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine for as long as needed”, the White House said in a statement. • The US believes that Vladimir Putin’s ally Yevgeny Prigozhin is interested in taking control of salt and gypsum from mines near the Ukrainian-held city of Bakhmut, a White House official said on Thursday. There were indications that monetary motives were driving Russia’s and

	<p>Prigozhin's "obsession" with Bakhmut, the official added. Prigozhin is the owner of private Russian military company Wagner Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germany's economy minister, Robert Habeck, said Germany providing weapons to Ukraine was a "good decision" during a Thursday briefing. Habeck's department has to approve weapons exports.
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HEADLINE	01/05 US, Germany armored vehicles to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/05/germany-tanks-ukraine-russia-war
GIST	<p>Joe Biden and his German counterpart Olaf Scholz have agreed to send infantry fighting vehicles to help Ukraine fight Russia, a day after France said it would supply its own armoured vehicles to Kyiv in an attempt to create a breakthrough in the 10-month war.</p> <p>The joint announcement followed a phone call between Biden and Scholz and amounts to a step change in western military support for Ukraine, which has asked for up to 700 armoured vehicles to help force the Russians out.</p> <p>"The United States intends to supply Ukraine with Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, and Germany intends to provide Ukraine with Marder infantry fighting vehicles," the White House said in a statement on Thursday.</p> <p>Ukraine has repeatedly said it needs 600 to 700 infantry fighting vehicles plus 300 tanks from the west in order to give its military a chance of breaking through the increasingly fortified Russian positions along the frontline.</p> <p>Until now, however, the US and Germany have been wary of supplying Ukraine with Nato-standard armour, because they feared it would be interpreted by Russia as escalatory. But the decision to supply western armoured vehicles is significant, even if both countries stopped short of sending tanks.</p> <p>Germany will also supply Ukraine with a Patriot air defence system, in addition to one promised by the US last month, the White House added. Both countries will train the Ukrainian military on the Marders and Bradleys, although it was not immediately clear how many of each would be supplied.</p> <p>Scholz's deputy spoke up in support. "This is a good decision," said Robert Habeck, the German vice-chancellor and economy minister, whose department has to green-light weapons exports.</p> <p>"Since the start of the war we have continuously expanded our support in coordination with our partners. It is only logical that we also take this step.</p> <p>"Ukraine has the right to defend itself against the Russian attack, and we have the duty to help her."</p> <p>France said on Wednesday it was upping its military aid to Kyiv by supplying an unspecified number of AMX-10 RC light armoured vehicles capable, experts said, of scouting roles and supporting main battle tanks. Hours later Biden hinted the US was considering following with the Bradleys.</p> <p>Earlier on Thursday, senior German ministers indicated their country's position was also evolving rapidly. Habeck, on a visit to the Norwegian capital, Oslo, said Germany's position had never been "static" and that it would be influenced by France and the US's willingness "to deliver lighter tanks".</p> <p>The German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, made similar comments. "I have pointed out time and time again we work with our partners to see what kind of military support is required by Ukraine," she said after a meeting with her British counterpart, James Cleverly, in London. Cleverly himself said tanks "might well be" part of the next phase of weapons transfers.</p>

On Wednesday night, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Paris's decision sent "a clear signal to all our other partners: there is no rational reason why Ukraine has not yet been supplied with western-type tanks".

Ukraine has long had its eye on western tanks and armour to complement its reduced fleet of Soviet-designed T-64 and T-72 tanks and BMP infantry vehicles, after more than 10 months of fighting.

Kyiv has received about 200 post-Soviet tanks from eastern European countries since the start of the war, but the available supply in Europe is now limited.

To replenish its stocks and build up a fresh attacking force, Ukraine has sought to obtain Leopard 2 tanks, or US-made M1A1 Abrams tanks, but its lobbying was unsuccessful last year.

"Tanks are potentially decisive because there is no substitute if you want to attack enemy formations in defensive positions," said Ben Barry, a former British army tank commander and land warfare analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies thinktank.

Russia has largely sought to dig in since abandoning its exposed position in Kherson on the west side of the Dnipro River in November, as it tries to consolidate its occupation of a swathe of territory roughly the size of Portugal in the east and south of Ukraine.

A breakthrough, if it comes at all, is likely to require the combined use of tanks, heavy armour and infantry, replicating a standard offensive tactic that dates back to the second world war. "The effectiveness of infantry is doubled, even with just three or four tanks helping," Barry added.

France's six-wheeled AMX-10 RC were first deployed in the 1980s and have been used in multiple operations, from Afghanistan to Mali. They are in the process of being phased out by Paris, however, making them an ideal gift for Ukraine.

An aide to France's president, Emmanuel Macron, said it was "the first time that western-designed tanks are supplied to the Ukrainian armed forces" but experts said the AMX-10 RC was too lightly armoured to be considered a proper tank.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Putin orders Russia forces brief ceasefire
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/05/world/russia-ukraine-news#it-was-unclear-if-ukraines-military-would-heed-putins-call-for-a-brief-cease-fire
GIST	<p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Thursday ordered his military to implement a 36-hour cease-fire along the front line in Ukraine for Orthodox Christmas, and urged the government in Kyiv to do the same, the Kremlin said.</p> <p>The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, responded with derision in his nightly address, casting shade on Mr. Putin's motives. He said Russia wanted "to use Christmas as a cover" to stop Ukrainian advances, regroup and bring more troops up to the front. He gave no indication that Ukraine would abide by a cease-fire, though he did not explicitly rule it out.</p> <p>The Kremlin said that Mr. Putin had set the cease-fire, which would be the broadest of its kind since Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearly a year ago, to last from midday on Friday until midnight on Saturday. The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed it had received the order.</p> <p>Russia celebrates Orthodox holidays based on the Julian calendar, as do some Ukrainians, which is different from the Gregorian calendar used by majority-Catholic and Protestant nations.</p>

“Given that a large number of citizens practicing Orthodoxy resides in the areas of hostilities, we call on the Ukrainian side to announce a cease-fire and give them an opportunity to attend services on Christmas Eve and the day of Christ’s birth,” the Kremlin statement said.

Analysts said Mr. Putin’s order appeared to be a public relations move that he can exploit regardless of Ukraine’s response. If Kyiv agrees to a cease-fire, it would give the Russia’s battered military an opportunity to regroup. If Ukraine ignores the cease-fire, Russia can claim it has the higher moral ground and further vilify Ukraine to the Russian public.

Ukrainian officials immediately cast doubt on the sincerity of Mr. Putin’s announcement, pointing out Russia had bombarded civilians on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. “Their current ‘unilateral cease-fire’ cannot and should not be taken seriously,” Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said in a Twitter post.

Mykhailo Podolyak, a senior presidential adviser, [wrote on Twitter](#) that Moscow’s troops “must leave the occupied territories — only then will it have a ‘temporary truce,’” adding, “Keep hypocrisy to yourself.” In a separate statement, he called the cease-fire order a “propaganda gesture” and a “banal trick.”

“There is not the slightest desire to end the war,” he said.

Some Ukrainians, especially in the western part of the country, [observe Christmas on Dec. 25](#), and on Christmas Eve Russian shelling [killed at least 10 people](#) in the recently recaptured Ukrainian city of Kherson.

In Washington, President Biden said it appeared to him that Mr. Putin was “trying to find some oxygen” with the cease-fire announcement. “I found it interesting, he was ready to bomb hospitals and nurseries and churches on the 25th and New Year’s,” Mr. Biden said.

Ned Price, the State Department spokesman, called Mr. Putin’s cease-fire announcement “cynical,” coming after Russian attacks on civilian targets. He warned that Russia might use a pause in fighting “to rest, to refit, to regroup and ultimately to re-attack.”

“We have little faith in the intentions behind this announcement,” he told reporters at a daily briefing. “I think we know better than to take anything we see or hear from Russia at face value.”

Stephane Dujarric, a spokesman for the U.N. Secretary General António Guterres, said a temporary truce for the Orthodox holiday was welcome would not replace a “just peace in line with the U.N. charter and international law.”

Germany’s foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, said a cease-fire do little to help Ukrainians living in fear under Russian occupation. “If Putin wanted peace, he would take his soldiers home and the war would be over,” she wrote [on Twitter](#). “But evidently he wants to continue the war after a short break.”

Mr. Putin’s announcement came just hours after the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill I called for a cease-fire to allow Orthodox Christians on the front line to attend services.

It also followed Mr. Putin’s conversation with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, who has positioned himself as a mediator in the conflict and on Thursday [called for a cease-fire](#).

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HEADLINE	01/05 Ukraine skepticism Putin ceasefire order
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/05/world/russia-ukraine-news#putins-cease-fire-order-is-met-with-skepticism-and-anger-on-both-sides

GIST	<p>The Russian president's decision to order his troops to implement a brief cease-fire over an Orthodox Christian holiday was less likely an act of generosity than it is strategic public relations move that he will seek to exploit domestically and on the battlefield, Ukrainian officials and independent analysts said.</p> <p>Oleksiy Danilov, the head of Ukraine's national security council, wrote on Twitter that the cease-fire amounted to "lies and hypocrisy" from "a flock of little Kremlin devils," underscoring the hostility in Kyiv toward a cease-fire President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia billed as enabling the celebration of Orthodox Christmas.</p> <p>A senior Ukrainian presidential adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, in a statement describing Mr. Putin's order as a "banal trick" and "an exclusively propaganda gesture." He added: "There is not the slightest desire to end the war."</p> <p>Mr. Putin's order puts Ukraine in a difficult position. If Kyiv refuses to honor the cease-fire, analysts said, Russia will likely try to claim higher moral ground on the international stage. If Kyiv does halt its attacks, it would give the battered Russian military time to regroup.</p> <p>The Kremlin "needs a break to partially restore its military power," Pavel Luzhin, a Russian military analyst, said in an interview.</p> <p>Mr. Luzhin said that Mr. Putin probably expects that Kyiv will not honor the cease-fire and has aimed the proposal at least partly to his domestic audience. A broken truce could be used to further vilify Ukrainians.</p> <p>"The Kremlin is going to demonstrate to Russians, who are mostly tired from the war, why the Russian leadership needs to continue fighting," Mr. Luzhin said.</p> <p>Mr. Putin also may be trying to avoid another military disaster during a day of festivities in Russia, one Russian political analyst, Tatiana Stanovaya, said. Earlier this week, a Ukrainian rocket strike killed at least 89 Russian servicemen housed at a vocational school in the Donbas, in one of Russia's worst military catastrophes of the war.</p> <p>Ms. Stanovaya said the proposal also showed Mr. Putin's desire to improve his international image.</p> <p>"The Christmas cease-fire is quite in line with Putin's logic, in which Russia is acting on the bright side of history and is fighting for justice, in its definition, of course," she wrote on Telegram.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Ukraine's economy adapts to survive
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/world/europe/ukraine-economy-russia.html
GIST	<p>Piles of corn and wheat are stuck in silos, as Russia's invasion stifles critical exports. Metal-producing factories in Ukraine's bombed-out east have ceased operating. And through nearly a year of war, over a third of Ukraine's spending is being directed at beating back the enemy.</p> <p>Despite major battlefield defeats in its invasion, the Kremlin's relentless war effort has sown economic havoc atop a devastating humanitarian toll in Ukraine. The country's economy shrank by 30.4 percent in 2022, its economy minister said Thursday, the largest decline since Ukraine declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.</p> <p>"It's easier to say what we lost" than what survives in Ukraine's economy, said Hlib Vyshlinsky, the executive director of the Centre for Economic Strategy, a think tank in Kyiv.</p> <p>Swaths of the country's industry and infrastructure have been partially or fully destroyed, and may not be rebuilt. Many businesses based in territory controlled by Russia, or in areas of heavy fighting, are not producing near their capacity, if at all. Consumers across the country are buying less because of high inflation and economic uncertainty generated by the war.</p>

But the war has also spurred Ukrainians to restructure parts of their economy at lightning speed, in ways big and small, as companies pack up operations or pivot to new business. That has fostered an extraordinary amount of economic adaptability that is not reflected in the dire numbers, and is setting the groundwork for potential rebuilding even before the war ends, the government argued.

Yulia Svyrydenko, the economy minister, said in a statement Thursday that the “indomitable spirit” of the Ukrainian people, along with financial support from international donors, had allowed the government in Kyiv to “maintain the economic front and continue our movement toward victory.” And while the damage has been profound, the hit to the economy was slightly lower than the worst forecasts.

The biggest damage has come in Ukraine’s major export sectors, which before the war made up the bulk of the country’s income. The conflict caused a 35 percent drop last year in exports of everything from wheat to steel.

Agriculture, once a pillar of Ukraine’s economy — making it known as a breadbasket of the world — has been dealt an especially harsh setback as Moscow continues to block most shipments, despite a U.N.-brokered deal.

Ukraine had also been a major exporter of metals and raw materials, such as iron ore. But nearly all of Ukraine’s large factories producing steel and other key metals were located in eastern territories that were captured or severely bombed by Russia. A vast majority of those facilities have more or less stopped operating, said Tymofiy Milovanov, the president of the Kyiv School of Economics.

Russian missiles have struck cities and facilities across the country, dealing heavy damage to a huge amount of the nation’s housing, transportation and energy infrastructure. The Kyiv School of Economics has estimated that the direct costs of war-related damage to Ukraine’s infrastructure were \$127 billion as of September.

Rebuilding the country will run to some \$750 billion, Ukrainian officials have said, while the World Bank has put the reconstruction estimate at closer to \$349 billion.

In order to revive its economy and manage a sustained recovery once the fighting ends — and it has no end in sight — Ukraine is expected to amass large debts.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank had both estimated that Ukraine’s economy would shrink by 35 percent in 2022. The I.M.F. had predicted modest economic growth for this year, but that is subject to huge uncertainty about the course of the war: The I.M.F. set the range of outcomes at a potential decline of more than 10 percent, in the pessimistic scenario, to growth of 10 percent in the more optimistic case.

Ukrainian officials are clinging to the sunnier outlook, in large part because a type of shadow economy has developed amid the war, said Mr. Milovanov. That has kept economic activity, powered by donated generators or volunteer efforts, for instance, humming beneath the radar of the dry statistical figures, he said.

“In some ways, the entire notion of a G.D.P. calculation during wartime is silly, because it assumes year-to-year preferences and production are constant, while shifts like a drop in services or people joining the military is seen as a negative,” Mr. Milovanov said in a phone interview from Kyiv. In fact, he said, economic activity in Ukraine has become “much more agile” to adapt to wartime.

Ukrainian farmers, for example, have continued to plant and harvest crops despite the threat from Russian rockets and land mines, and have adapted planting to cultivate more in-demand crops, like corn.

The industrial sector has adapted, too. Factories producing everything from mattresses to trucks have relocated from cratered regions of the east to the relative safety of Ukraine's western frontier.

Hundreds of plants that had been in Russian-occupied areas were packed up in the summer and moved on trains and trucks to Ukraine's west. Outside the city of Lviv, close to Poland — Ukraine's gateway to Germany and western Europe — many of the reborn businesses are forging ties with the European Union, which Ukraine hopes to join soon.

Ukrainian tech start-ups are writing software for foreign companies and now have direct lines to major companies in Europe and the United States, where many want to help Ukraine through the war.

Thousands of Ukrainians displaced by war have also set up as entrepreneurs elsewhere in the country to try to forge new lives and add to the local economy. Even restaurants have adapted: Many have stayed open for business despite power outages through innovations like "candlelight menus," or meals that don't require cooking.

"Ukrainians are resilient," said Mr. Vyshlinsky, the think tank director. During blackouts in the capital, he said, the soundtrack of a walk through the city is an "orchestra of power generators."

And with vast amounts of Ukraine's national budget having been redirected toward military spending, hundreds of new small businesses have sprung up to cater to the wartime economy's needs.

"The nature of demand is now coming from the Defense Ministry, so if you can produce bulletproof vests, military training, services for medical training or even cybersecurity equipment, many new companies have been created, and they are profitable," Mr. Milovanov added.

Yet Russia's destruction of critical infrastructure has dealt Ukraine a setback heading into the second year of the war. The path of Ukraine's economy this year will depend heavily on the ability to keep electricity flowing, limiting the length of blackouts and the need to ration power, according to Mr. Vyshlinsky.

He forecasts economic growth to be flat this year — a less optimistic outlook than many forecasters, but also not as pessimistic as those who think that another big drop is in store.

In the meantime, international donors are circling Ukraine, which has laid out a blueprint for an eventual Marshall Plan to help rebuild once the war has ended. Ukrainian leaders have also made plans for the short term, recognizing that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia appears determined to continue with the invasion.

Ukraine has found ready supporters in the West, where leaders have largely remained unified despite the soaring energy prices caused by the war. So far, countries and institutions in the European Union have committed nearly 52 billion euros, about \$55 billion, in military, financial, and humanitarian aid, while the United States has pledged some \$51 billion, according to data compiled by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, a German research organization.

Many governments and international companies, eyeing the prospect of a vast bounty of postwar contracts, are rushing to help Ukraine now, in the hopes of renewed deals when rebuilding starts in earnest.

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HEADLINE	01/05 US recognizes Türkiye, instead of Turkey
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/05/world/middleeast/turkey-spelling-change.html
GIST	Breaking with longstanding practice, the State Department will use the Turkish government's preferred spelling, Türkiye, instead of Turkey, a spokesman said on Thursday.

The spokesman, Ned Price, said the U.S. Board on Geographic Names had approved the new name, which the State Department will use in “most formal, diplomatic, and bilateral contexts,” and in “public communications.”

Mr. Price was asked about the change at a news conference after [The Associated Press reported it](#) on Thursday. He said the decision had been made in response to a request from the Turkish Embassy, adding that other U.S. government departments and agencies had already begun using the new spelling.

Turkish people have referred to their country as Türkiye (pronounced tur-KEE-yeh) since it was established in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The Anglicized version of the country’s name has been the norm for the rest of the world for decades.

The State Department’s decision came about six months after Turkey [officially changed its name to Türkiye at the United Nations](#).

For several years, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has publicly opposed the use of the Anglicized spelling for his country and has pushed for the rest of the world to use its Turkish-language name. In April 2021, he [signed a memorandum](#) saying that Türkiye best represented Turkish culture and history and should be used as the country’s name in all languages. Export products should be printed with the phrase “Made in Türkiye,” not “Made in Turkey,” the memo advised.

“The phrase ‘Türkiye’ symbolizes and conveys the Turkish nation’s culture, civilization, and values in the best way possible,” the memo said, adding that the spelling should replace alternative spellings used in other countries, including “Turkei” and “Turquie” as well as “Turkey.”

Last year, the state broadcaster’s English-language outlet, TRT World, promoted a video campaign called “Hello! Türkiye” to raise “global awareness” about the rebrand. One [video](#) shows people repeatedly using the country’s Turkish-language name.

Erdağ Göknar, an associate professor of Turkish and Middle Eastern studies at Duke University, said that while “Turkey” is viewed as a “holdover” from a colonial order, the use of “Türkiye” is seen as emphasizing national agency and pride.

“‘Turkey’ was seen as being an outsider appellation with an imperial and colonial legacy,” Professor Göknar said. “Not least of all, the association with the bird was accepted as a denigrating legacy of a bygone era.”

The State Department has previously adopted name changes requested by other countries, including Swaziland, which in 2018 [modified its name](#) to the Kingdom of Eswatini, or Eswatini.

As of Thursday afternoon, the State Department [had not updated its website](#) with Turkey’s new name.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Major crackdown illegal border crossings
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/05/us/politics/biden-border-crossings.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden on Thursday announced a far-reaching crackdown on people who seek refuge at the border with Mexico, dramatically expanding restrictions on asylum in the most aggressive effort of his administration to discourage migrants from crossing into the United States.</p> <p>In remarks at the White House that drew immediate condemnation from human rights organizations, Mr. Biden said his administration would deny people from Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Haiti the chance to apply for asylum if they cross the Mexican border without authorization between official ports of entry.</p> <p>He said people from those countries, who are among the many tens of thousands of migrants who try to cross the border every month, would be swiftly returned to Mexico instead.</p>

“Today, my administration is taking several steps to stiffen enforcement for those who try to come without a legal right to stay,” Mr. Biden said in remarks at the White House, days before a two-day summit meeting in Mexico City.

“My message is this,” he said. “If you’re trying to leave Cuba, Nicaragua or Haiti, or have agreed to begin a journey to America, do not, do not just show up at the border.”

In a concession designed to offset the humanitarian impact of the new restrictions, Mr. Biden said that as many as 30,000 people per month from the four countries would be given the chance to migrate legally to the United States if they have the means to afford a plane ticket, get a sponsor, download an app, pass a background check and meet other requirements.

The changes reflect a determination by Mr. Biden and his advisers to ratchet up enforcement of existing immigration laws to confront record-breaking surges of migration at the southern border. The president’s announcement comes after months of fierce debate inside the West Wing over whether to embrace tough border measures first imposed by former President Donald J. Trump.

In his remarks, Mr. Biden described the overall approach as very different from his predecessor and said the new policy was intended to expand opportunities for migrants looking to escape danger and seek better opportunities in America.

But immigration advocates denounced the new enforcement changes as loudly as they had attacked some of the former president’s proposals. In a torrent of statements, they accused the Biden administration of including vast new restrictions on the right to claim asylum for people escaping dangers in their home countries.

“This benefit will exclude migrants fleeing violence and persecution who do not have the ability or economic means to qualify,” said Senator Bob Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey. He called the new policies “merely an attempt to replace our asylum laws, and thousands of asylum seekers waiting to present their cases will be hurt as a result.”

Eleanor Acer, the director of the refugee protection program at Human Rights First, called the new policies “a humanitarian disgrace” and said the president should not be adding restrictions on people who seek refuge in the United States.

“The Biden administration should be taking steps to restore asylum law at ports of entry,” Ms. Acer said, “not doubling down on cruel and counterproductive policies from the Trump playbook.”

The surge in migration has become an increasingly difficult political problem for Mr. Biden. House Republicans have promised to begin investigations into the administration’s handling of the border and to weigh impeachment proceedings against Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, once they elect a leader.

Mr. Biden said he would make his first trip as president to the border on Sunday with a trip to El Paso, where many migrants have been sleeping on sidewalks. The mayor declared a state of emergency last month and call for the federal government to help alleviate the pressure on resources.

Mr. Biden said he would announce new funding to help communities deal with the effects of the migration increase.

“I know that migration is putting a real strain on the borders and border communities,” Mr. Biden said, adding that “our problems at the border didn’t arise overnight, and they are not going to be solved overnight. It’s a difficult problem.”

Mr. Biden acknowledged that the new policies fall far short of a complete overhaul of the nation's immigration laws, which he proposed to Congress on the day he took office. He lashed out at Republicans for refusing to even consider that proposal.

"If the most extreme Republicans continue to demagogue this issue and reject solutions," the president said, "I'm left with only one choice: act on my own, do as much as I can on my own to try to change the atmosphere."

Officials have said that most of the recent migrants from Central and South America trying to cross through Mexico to reach the United States are from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua.

Migrants from those countries who seek to travel to the United States by passing through Mexico would be automatically ineligible for the new program. And those who try to cross into the United States will be more quickly targeted for removal to Mexico, which has agreed to accept up to 30,000 migrants each month from the four countries.

In a briefing, Mr. Mayorkas told reporters that the program would drastically lessen the need for people from the four countries to make the dangerous journey across the U.S.-Mexico border. An earlier program that applied only to Venezuelans significantly reduced the number of migrants from that country at the border.

"We again call on Congress to legislate, to provide sufficient resources to manage the increased encounters at the border and to fix the immigration system everyone agrees is terribly broken," Mr. Mayorkas said. "Absent congressional action, we will do what we can using the authorities and resources available to us to manage the border in a safe, orderly and humane manner."

But it is unclear how many of the people from the four countries will be able or willing to take advantage of the new program. In November, more than 82,000 migrants from those four countries crossed into the country illegally. If crossings continue in similar numbers and Mexico only accepts 30,000 asylum seekers a month in the new program, the United States will have to continue to let thousands stay in the country temporarily.

Administration officials said that Mr. Biden would also triple the number of refugees that the United States accepts each year from the Western Hemisphere to 20,000. The refugee program is a separate way for people who are fleeing persecution to apply to come to the United States legally.

For now, officials said border agents would continue to quickly expel migrants from the four countries under an order put in place during the coronavirus pandemic, using legal authority granted by Title 42. The Supreme Court is currently considering a challenge by Republican-led states to the administration's plan to stop enforcing the health order.

But Mr. Biden made clear that he intends for the tougher enforcement on migrants from the four countries to remain in place even if the court allows the administration to end the use of Title 42. In that case, border officials will rely on other laws to quickly expel migrants.

Immigrant rights advocates say those laws, including one known as expedited removal, deny people their rights to due process and are used as a way to prevent them from winning legitimate claims for asylum, which are guaranteed by U.S. and international law.

The Biden administration is also embracing a restrictive policy developed under Mr. Trump, in which migrants who travel through a third country, such as Mexico, can be denied asylum in the United States because they have not applied for asylum in another country first.

The Department of Homeland Security said on Thursday that officials would propose a rule that would make migrants ineligible for asylum if they "fail to seek protection in a country through which they traveled on their way to the United States." Migrants who violate the rule would be barred from seeking

	<p>legal entry to the United States for five years. The new rule would require public hearings and a monthslong review process, officials said.</p> <p>Despite the new measures, Mr. Biden also drew criticism from hard-line Republicans. Stephen Miller, the architect of Mr. Trump’s assault on immigration, said the president’s enforcement announcements would still allow thousands of migrants to be released into the United States while their asylum cases were heard.</p> <p>“Biden has a simple, unyielding goal,” Mr. Miller said. “His goal is to increase the foreign-born population of the United States as speedily as possible from all the nations of the world, consequences for Americans be damned.”</p> <p>Yuri Canton, a bus driver from Havana, said new policies would not discourage desperate people from trying to cross the border.</p> <p>“Nothing is going to stop Cubans, not even two more walls, because the situation in Cuba is extremely precarious,” said Mr. Canton, 44, who left behind a wife and two children, ages 10 and 8, in Cuba to make the journey to America. He said he could not feed his family with the wages he earned.</p> <p>Speaking from a shelter in Tucson, Ariz., Mr. Canton said he would try to make it to West Palm Beach in Florida.</p> <p>“All the Cubans are leaving,” he said, “and we will keep leaving.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Wet, windy weather continues western WA
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/thousands-without-power-as-wet-windy-weather-continues-in-western-wa/
GIST	<p>Western Washington is in for continuous rounds of wind and rain “basically every 24 hours or so for the next several days,” said Matthew Cullen, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.</p> <p>A weather system lurking over the Pacific Ocean is responsible for locking the region into an active weather pattern, as well as slamming the West Coast with damaging winds and rain, according to NWS.</p> <p>“We have cloudy skies, breezy winds and rain in the forecast all the way through the weekend and even the start of next week,” Cullen said.</p> <p>Overnight Wednesday into Thursday, gusts peaked as high as 69 mph at Crystal Mountain, 56 mph in Enumclaw and 49 mph at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, according to NWS. These areas were still breezy throughout the day Thursday, Cullen said.</p> <p>As of roughly 5 p.m. Thursday, 6,122 Puget Sound Energy customers were in the dark. Early Thursday morning, more than 19,000 customers were without power.</p> <p>The Enumclaw School District was closed Thursday due to widespread power outages and road closures, according to the district.</p> <p>More rain and gusty winds from the south continued Thursday as a second system was expected to push inland in the evening, according to NWS.</p> <p>The weather service issued a wind advisory for 25-35 mph winds and gusts up to 50 mph through 4 a.m. Friday for areas along the Washington coast.</p> <p>Gale warnings also remain in effect until 1 a.m. Friday for areas along the coast and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.</p>

	<p>Seas will be stormy along the coast with swells near 17-19 feet and possible 20-foot waves as the system slides over the Pacific, according to the weather service.</p> <p>Flooding was expected Thursday along the coast, Strait of Juan de Fuca, Admiralty Inlet and San Juan Islands where tidal overflow may cause water to spread into parking lots, parks and roadways, the weather service said.</p> <p>Highs for most of the Seattle area Thursday climbed a few degrees from Wednesday's mid-40s.</p> <p>The next weather system (if you're counting, this is the third) will be quick to follow, bringing rain to the early morning hours of Friday.</p> <p>If you're traveling through the Cascades, expect slick roads as wet and windy conditions reach the summits, "but we're not seeing any major storms in terms of dumping large amounts of snow at least for the next several days," Cullen said.</p> <p>Another system will move into the region Friday into Saturday, bringing more rain and wind into Western Washington.</p> <p>"At this point, any break [in active weather] would be beyond the current seven-day forecast, which is to the middle of next week," Cullen said. "But that's not to say it's a total washout all the time. We'll be alternating this pattern between the lighter rain and the heavier rain for the next seven days."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Tacoma's guaranteed income experiment
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/how-tacomas-yearlong-guaranteed-income-experiment-fared/
GIST	<p>When the pandemic hit in 2020, Debbie Wilkerson decided to retire early from her job at Jack-in-the-Box.</p> <p>But it wasn't really by choice, said the 64-year-old Tacoma resident. With schools shut down, she needed to home-school her 13-year-old grandson, James Carcione, who is on the autism spectrum, while her son continued to go to work.</p> <p>Already struggling under a crush of debt — a hodgepodge of overdue bills, collection calls, court fines — the Wilkerson family's financial precarity worsened during the pandemic. They made just \$22 too much each month to qualify for many COVID-19 rent and utility relief programs, she said.</p> <p>"When you're living check to check, you know, it's hard to catch up and pay it off," she said.</p> <p>But then the family caught a break. Wilkerson's family was selected as one of 110 households in Tacoma to receive \$500 a month for 12 months as part of a guaranteed income program. Called Growing Resilience In Tacoma, or GRIT, the program distributed the final cash payments to families last month.</p> <p>Led by the city of Tacoma and local nonprofit United Way Pierce County, organizers described the guaranteed income program as a radical rethinking of the social safety net, offering families barely managing to scrape by the opportunity to lift themselves out of the cycle of poverty. Efforts at the state level are underway that could bring a similar program to other Washington residents by June 2024.</p> <p>Unlike typical government welfare programs, Tacoma's guaranteed income program provided funds to families with no strings attached, with advocates arguing that individuals know how to spend money in the way that best serves their household and well-being.</p> <p>Critics of guaranteed income programs argue money without conditions would discourage people from working or becoming self-sufficient. They also raise concerns about the costs of such programs. Some warn small cash payments can't be a panacea for rectifying generations of income inequality, poverty and</p>

racial disparities, and are wary of guaranteed income programs replacing other long-established public benefits like food stamps.

“These additional resources are making a difference to families, they are able to take control of their lives, it brings a sense of dignity,” said United Way Pierce County President and CEO Dona Ponepinto.

For Wilkerson, the money each month has been transformative. She’s been able to pay off her family’s debt and clean up their credit reports.

Her dream of buying a house that she can one day pass down to her grandson finally feels achievable — she and her son now qualify for a mortgage, she said.

“It was a blessing for our family,” Wilkerson said. “I never thought that it was even possible or in our sight.”

Floated as a theory among some academics and activists for decades, support for no-strings-attached direct payment programs has swelled in recent years, cropping up in [dozens of cities and counties](#) in the United States.

Andrew Yang, 2020 presidential candidate, brought the concept into the national spotlight, championing a \$1,000-a-month universal basic income program for every American adult.

Then, direct aid became the primary form of COVID-19 relief for families, as the federal government funneled billions toward stimulus checks, child tax credits and unemployment benefits.

A 2021 [study from left-leaning think tank Data for Progress](#) found about 55% of Americans support some form of universal basic income or some form of guaranteed income. Guaranteed income refers to payments given to a specific group of people, such as based on need, while universal basic income typically refers to money given to every adult in the general public.

All 110 GRIT participants were employed, single-income-earner households with children, living at between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level. In many cases, these families make too much to be eligible for public assistance, but still cannot make ends meet, said Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards.

The recipients are “people who get up every day and go to work to make a better life, but are just a penny over the poverty level [and] can’t take care of [a \\$500 emergency](#),” Woodards said.

About 31% of Pierce County residents are just above the poverty line but make less than what it costs to make ends meet, and lack the wealth and savings to weather financial crises, according to United Way Pierce County data. In Tacoma, the number is closer to 40%, making the city an ideal place to test out guaranteed income, the organization said.

“So many programs out there are meant to help families, but really it’s helping to manage their poverty, they’re not moving them [to] where they are sufficient and don’t have to rely on public assistance,” said Ponepinto of United Way Pierce County.

The final report on the program — which will include details like changes in employment, education attainment, mental and physical health and family relationships — will be released in summer 2024.

But GRIT director Abigail Lawson said preliminary evidence and anecdotes from recipients have already proven the success of a guaranteed income program.

Nearly half of the money distributed to families has been spent on retail sales and services, such as spending at Target and Walmart, discount stores, or local businesses. In addition, about 23% has been spent on food and groceries, and 12% has been spent on housing and utilities, according to GRIT data.

Lawson acknowledged \$6,000 over the course of a year might not seem like a life-changing amount of money. But it is enough to avoid picking up a second or third job, or to clean up a family's credit, or to stave off the impacts of inflation, she said.

Organizers also have seen the money support a higher standard of living, helping families afford a day out at the roller-skating rink or tickets to a Mariners game. One parent paid for tutoring classes for their children. In another case, a family traveled across the country to attend the funeral of a loved one. The extra cash allowed one recipient to take certification tests and qualify for a promotion and raise.

With high inflation and growing economic precarity, guaranteed income has become more pertinent and necessary as a stabilizer, Lawson said.

"When you're looking at how people are lifting themselves out of poverty, that is a huge game-changer," Woodards said. "It's showing that it's possible."

The GRIT program received \$600,000 from the [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income](#) coalition to administer and distribute payments.

The coalition has launched localized programs nationwide, following in the footsteps of a pioneering guaranteed income experiment in Stockton, California, which ran from February 2019 to June 2020.

Researchers found the lives of participants in the Stockton program [measurably improved](#) — compared to nonrecipients in the control group, individuals who received payments were healthier and happier, [employed at a higher rate](#) and could more easily handle sudden, unexpected expenses.

Other local guaranteed income programs in the United States have shown similar results, helping recipients increase their monthly income, decrease their reliance on government assistance and reduce food insecurity.

While GRIT organizers say their program proves guaranteed income is a viable plan for reducing poverty, they note city-level programs like GRIT funded through private grants are not sustainable. United Way Pierce County and Tacoma officials say they will advocate for a statewide program in the coming months.

Momentum has already been building. In 2021, a state work group recommended creating a pilot guaranteed income program as part of a 10-year poverty reduction plan. In June, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services released a feasibility study, estimating a two-year pilot would cost between \$65 million and \$244 million.

Last year, state Rep. Liz Berry, D-Seattle, sponsored a bill that would give monthly payments to very low-income adults for up to three years that cover the fair market rent of a two-bedroom apartment in their area — roughly \$2,000 in Seattle, \$1,500 in Tacoma and \$1,100 in Wenatchee.

While that bill died last year, advocates say the proposal was mostly intended to generate buzz. With the state feasibility study in hand, Rep. Berry has already pre-filed a bill this year to fund a Washington state pilot program that could include up to 7,500 participants.

"Guaranteed Basic Income is a proven strategy to reduce poverty by offering participants the freedom and dignity about how best to provide for their families," Rep. Berry said in a statement. "It's a smarter, more compassionate, and less expensive way to give people basic help."

As for Wilkerson in Tacoma, she's since returned to working at Jack-in-the-Box part time, doing prep work in the morning to bring in a little extra money. But having paid off her family's debts, Wilkerson no longer feels the same financial pressures she did before the GRIT program, and doesn't plan on returning to work full time.

	<p>Though the GRIT program has ended, its benefits will have lasting impacts on Wilkerson's family and their futures, she said.</p> <p>"Even that little more money was a help," Wilkerson said. "We knew it was going to go away, so we've been thinking, 'How are we going to fix this, pay for that?' ... It helped us financially work things out where we could still go forward."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Concern: 'kraken' Covid variant XBB.1.5
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/what-we-know-about-the-kraken-covid-variant-xbb-1-5-and-why-its-causing-concern/
GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg News</i> - A new COVID-19 variant that was first detected last year has quickly become the dominant strain in the U.S. — and picked up a creepy moniker along the way.</p> <p>Nicknamed the "kraken variant" by some, it surged through the nation and has now been identified in at least 28 other countries, according to the World Health Organization. Is it more dangerous? Does it spread more easily? And how will it affect China's COVID-19 outbreak?</p> <p>Here are all your questions, answered.</p> <p>What is the new variant? XBB.1.5 is a descendant of the omicron XBB subvariant — which is itself a cross between two earlier strains: BA.2.75 and BA.2.10.1.</p> <p>The original XBB variant has already caused waves of infection in countries including Singapore and India since the WHO first raised concern about it last October.</p> <p>How fast is XBB.1.5 spreading? While accounting for just 1% of all COVID-19 cases at the start of December, estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that it surged to become the dominant strain by the end of the month, responsible for about 41% of all infections. In northeastern states, that figure has jumped above 70%.</p> <p>XBB.1.5 is "the most transmissible subvariant which has been detected yet," said WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, Maria Van Kerkhove, during a news conference on Jan. 4. While only 29 countries have reported cases caused by it, health authorities are warning it could be much more widespread and silently proliferating thanks to a drop-off in testing.</p> <p>In other countries, the proportion of infections caused by XBB.1.5 has remained lower, although the picture may rapidly change. Estimates from the Wellcome Sanger Institute found that the variant made up around 4% of COVID-19 infections in England as of mid-December, while Canada has found a handful of such cases.</p> <p>Scientists pointed out that the subvariant has a much stronger affinity to ACE2, a key receptor for the virus, which allows it to bind more easily and boosts its transmissibility.</p> <p>Is it more dangerous than previous variants? There haven't been significant differences in severity reported between cases caused by XBB.1.5 and previous variants. Like other strains that concerned scientists, however, XBB.1.5 is attracting attention because it is exhibiting signs of immunity escape. That means it has an ability to evade natural immunity or previous protection provided by vaccines, and reinfect people who have recovered from an earlier bout of COVID-19.</p> <p>Data remains limited on XBB.1.5's severity and its propensity to cause severe disease or death.</p>

Previous therapies to tackle COVID-19 — like monoclonal antibody treatments — were rendered ineffective by previous strains. That trend is set to continue with the new variant. Scientists in a recent peer-reviewed article published in the journal *Cell* warned that subvariants like XBB pose “serious threats” to current COVID-19 vaccines. Higher transmissibility also means more people are likely to get infected, and thereby suffer severe outcomes.

It’s unclear if the U.S. experience with XBB.1.5 will extend to other countries. America, unlike many other developed nations, suffers from low vaccination rates. Only 15% of the population aged 5 and above has received an updated bivalent booster dose. The rate is slightly better among the vulnerable elderly population, including those aged 65 and above, with fewer than four in 10 receiving the shot. Hospitalization rates for COVID-19 are rising, amid a surge in other winter-season infections like influenza.

The WHO plans to release an updated assessment on the variant’s risks in the coming days.

Has it reached China yet and what will be its impact?

China, which is going through a major wave of infections after dismantling its stringent “COVID-zero” policy in recent weeks, has yet to report any domestic cases of XBB.1.5. Shanghai has detected three infections caused by the variant and said all were imported cases. But health agencies across the world, including the WHO, have raised concerns that China isn’t providing enough genomic sequencing information to come to any definitive conclusions.

In the meantime, the country’s COVID-19 wave is being driven by two other omicron strains: BA.5.2 and BF.7. Together they account for 97.5% of all local infections, according to genomic sequencing data from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

While authorities have tried to allay fears that the XBB variants will drive new waves of infection, the public — already spooked by the strained health care system and limited availability of treatments — isn’t convinced. A widely circulated viral post claiming the XBB variant may lead to vomiting and diarrhea led to an anti-diarrheal medication selling out across China as panicked buyers snapped it up.

Where did the ‘kraken’ name come from?

COVID-19 variants are named by an expert group convened by the WHO. It identifies so-called variants of concern that have potential global public health significance, such as reducing the effectiveness of current pandemic measures, using the Greek alphabet. Previous strains like alpha, beta and delta fell under the convention.

But the last Greek-named variant, omicron, emerged more than a year ago and left no room for the emergence of other, significantly different strains. Omicron has spawned multiple lineages, including XBB.1.5, and their names stem from a mix of alphabets and numbers known as “Pango.”

That has led to the rise in popularity of informal online nicknames, including “kraken.” The moniker for XBB.1.5 was proposed by an evolutionary professor on Twitter to match the strength of the new strain with the mythological sea monster.

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HEADLINE	01/05 New wave vaccine misinformation spreads
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/hamlins-collapse-spurs-new-wave-of-vaccine-misinformation/
GIST	WASHINGTON — Unfounded claims about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines proliferated in the hours and days after Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin collapsed during Monday’s game, revealing how pervasive vaccine misinformation remains three years after the pandemic began.

Even before Hamlin was carried off the field in Cincinnati, posts amassing thousands of shares and millions of views began circulating online claiming without evidence that complications from COVID-19 vaccines caused his health emergency.

While cardiac specialists say it's too soon to know what caused Hamlin's heart to stop, they've offered a rare type of trauma called commotio cordis as among the possible culprits. Physicians interviewed by The Associated Press say there's no indication Hamlin's vaccine status played a role, and said there's no evidence to support claims that a number of young athletes have died as a result of COVID vaccinations.

Peter McCullough, a Dallas cardiologist and outspoken vaccine critic, amplified the theories on a Fox News segment hosted by Tucker Carlson on Tuesday, speculating that "vaccine-induced myocarditis," may have caused Hamlin's episode. While the Bills have not said whether Hamlin was vaccinated, about 95% of NFL players have received a COVID-19 vaccine, according to the league.

In his Tuesday segment, Carlson claimed McCullough and another researcher found that "more than 1,500 total cardiac arrests" have occurred among European athletes "since the vax campaign began."

But Carlson was citing a letter in which the authors' evidence was a dubious blog that lists news reports of people all over the world, of all ages, dying or experiencing medical emergencies. The blog proves no relationship between the incidents and COVID-19 vaccines; it also includes in its count reported deaths from cancer and emergencies of unknown causes.

"It's not real research, but he quotes it as if it's real research," said Dr. Matthew Martinez, director of sports cardiology at Atlantic Health System in Morristown Medical Center. "Anybody can write a letter to the editor and then quote an article that has no academic rigor."

Many social media users have also shared deceptive videos that purport to show athletes collapsing on-field because of COVID-19 vaccines. However, several of the cases shown have been proven to be from other causes.

Though anti-vaccine influencers have insisted that sudden cardiac arrests during sports games are unprecedented, cardiologists say they've observed these traumatic events throughout their careers, and long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There have always been cases of athletes having sudden cardiac death or cardiac arrest," said Dr. Lawrence Phillips, sports health expert and cardiologist at NYU Langone Health. "I have not seen a change in the prevalence of them over the last couple of years versus earlier in my career."

In fact, Phillips said, these rare medical emergencies are the main reason that doctors and activists have spent years campaigning for defibrillators to be on standby at sporting events.

That push, and the implementation of emergency action plans, has improved outcomes after cardiac events on the playing field, even as the number of such events has remained "remarkably stable," Martinez said.

Martinez, who has worked for the National Football League, National Basketball Association, National Hockey League and Major League Soccer, said he has investigated but not seen any signal that COVID-19 or vaccines are causing an increased incidence of cardiac events among athletes.

His research shows that among professional athletes who have had COVID-19, rates of inflammatory heart disease were about 0.6% — showing no increased risk compared to other viruses.

Online posts mentioning Hamlin and vaccines soared into the thousands within one hour of Hamlin's collapse, according to an analysis conducted for the AP by Zignal Labs, a San Francisco-based media intelligence company.

	<p>It's not surprising that misleading claims about COVID-19 vaccines surged following Hamlin's cardiac arrest, given how much vaccine misinformation has spread since the pandemic began, said Jeanine Guidry, a Virginia Commonwealth University professor who researches health misinformation and vaccine hesitancy.</p> <p>High-profile public events like Hamlin's collapse often create new waves of misinformation as people grasp for explanations. For people concerned about vaccine safety, Hamlin's sudden collapse served to affirm and justify their beliefs, Guidry said.</p> <p>"This happened to a person in the prime of their life, on primetime television, and the people watching didn't immediately know why," she said. "We like to have clear answers that make us feel safer. Especially after the last three years, I think this is coming from fear and uncertainty."</p> <p>Similarly unfounded claims about vaccine injuries surged last month following the death of sports journalist Grant Wahl, who died of a ruptured blood vessel in his heart while covering the World Cup in Qatar. His death was not related to vaccines.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 China Covid crisis: infections run rampant
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/china-covid-crisis-beijing-hospital-beds-families-burn-bodies-streets-deaths-spike
GIST	<p>A Beijing hospital has run out of beds, forcing patients to rest on stretchers or lay on the hallway floors as COVID-19 infections run rampant in the country and stretch thin the public health sectors' resources.</p> <p>"We have no beds, we have no oxygen, and we have a room full of sick people waiting," a health care worker in Beijing Chaoyang Hospital's emergency room told the Financial Times ahead of Christmas.</p> <p>China has watched as cases of COVID-19 spiked following the rollback of the country's "zero-COVID" policy as the abrupt shift occurred without any increase in vaccinations. Instead, officials tried to simply bolster hospitals in anticipation of a new COVID-19 wave by establishing hundreds of "fever clinics" to increase testing.</p> <p>The hospitals were not prepared for just how significant the wave ended up being, with the Chuiyangliu hospital in eastern Beijing packed with new arrivals and unable to properly sequester them on Jan. 5.</p> <p>One report even suggested that hospitals have told patients to "bring your own bed" due to the shortage.</p> <p>Pictures from the Associated Press show old women bent over with oxygen masks in the hallways as they wait for triage from doctors.</p> <p>Dr. Marc Siegel, professor of medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center and a Fox News medical contributor, told Fox News Digital that the resulting wave of COVID-19 infections show that the "zero-COVID" strategy "clearly backfired."</p> <p>"As soon as they released [the policy], there was rampant spread of a highly contagious subvariant, XBB, and high risk of a new, more dangerous variant emerging," Siegel said. "China stuck with their own vaccines, which are inferior to ours, and there hasn't been much recent vaccine uptake, so the vaccines have mostly worn off."</p> <p>He added that China's "vulnerable populations have poor vaccine uptake, leading to hospitalization and death."</p> <p>Latest estimates indicate that deaths could rise from 9,000 a day to as many as 25,000 a day in January — a stark contrast to the astronomically low 5,227 deaths prior to the end of "zero-COVID" in comparison to the total population, even though Siegel said that "we can't rely on [China's] numbers."</p>

The World Health Organization (WHO) raised concerns about China's lack of transparency regarding its current situation, with Emergencies Director Dr. Michael Ryan arguing that China's current figures "under-represent the true impact of the disease in terms of hospital admissions, in terms of ICU admissions and particularly in terms of deaths," British newspaper the Evening Standard reported.

As COVID-19 cases continued to spread, China changed its criteria for key data reporting, mainly what qualifies as a COVID-related death — limited to deaths caused by respiratory failure and pneumonia — and ceased to report asymptomatic cases.

President Joe Biden said that China had been "very sensitive" when the U.S. and WHO raised concerns that officials "haven't been forthcoming." The U.S., along with several other nations, imposed testing requirements for travelers from China, with Morocco outright banning any arrivals from the country.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters on Thursday, "Facts have proved that China has always, in accordance with the principles of legality, timeliness, openness and transparency, maintained close communication and shared relevant information and data with the WHO in a timely manner."

"At the moment, China's COVID situation is under control. As China adjusts its COVID response policy, we will continue to carry out activities, including technical exchanges with the WHO," Mao said during a press briefing. "It is hoped that the WHO Secretariat will take a science-based, objective and just position and play a positive role in addressing the pandemic globally."

Mao added that "the COVID situation in China is under control," but images out of China present a different story as pictures of street cremations increase as the number of deaths and bodies overwhelm funeral homes.

In one clip shared on Twitter, a wooden casket can be seen burning on the side of what is allegedly a road in rural China; another shows families gathered around a parking lot cremation in the middle of a city, according to the New York Post.

And Bloomberg reported that funeral homes can't afford to offer families more than 10 minutes to grieve in a room stuffed with bodies on stretchers before moving on, with one funeral home handling more than 500 corpses — five times the usual number.

One family said they were "lucky" that it was wintertime because they had to wait five days before the funeral home in Shanghai could come to collect their relative's body.

An employee at the Longhua Funeral Home told Bloomberg that "the whole system is paralyzed right now."

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HEADLINE	01/05 Albuquerque PD: election officials targeted
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/albuquerque-shootings-elected-officials-police-investigating/
GIST	<p>Albuquerque detectives are investigating multiple incidents where the homes or offices of local elected leaders have been targeted by gunfire in the past month. All five politicians are Democrats.</p> <p>In a press conference Thursday, Albuquerque Police Department chief Harold Medina said that the department is "working with federal partners" on an investigation into the incidents, which he said is a "top priority."</p> <p>"We are worried and concerned that these are connected and possibly politically motivated or personally motivated, but we don't know that for a fact," said Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller.</p>

Medina also stressed that it was not yet clear if the shootings are related. "The investigation will hopefully determine what's related and what's not," he said.

The first shooting occurred on the afternoon of Dec. 4, when someone shot eight rounds at the home of Bernalillo County Commissioner Adriann Barboa in Southeast Albuquerque, Medina said.

"It is traumatizing to have several bullets shot directly through my front door when my family and I were getting ready to celebrate Christmas," Barboa said in an email release that was [reviewed by CBS affiliate KROQ](#). "No one deserves threatening and dangerous attacks like this; we ask our fellow New Mexicans to be alert and attentive while the investigation proceeds."

On Dec. 11, the home of then-Bernalillo Commissioner Debbie O'Malley in the North Valley was shot at. Investigators found more than a dozen gunshot impacts at the scene, according to Medina. O'Malley left her position as commissioner after serving the maximum amount of terms in the seat.

The third shooting took place at the home of state Senator Linda Lopez on Tuesday, when at least eight shots were fired at her Southwest Albuquerque residence just after midnight, police said. In a statement, Lopez said that bullets entered her daughter's bedroom.

"Three of the bullets passed through my 10-year-old daughter's bedroom," Lopez said. "I am asking the public to provide any information they may have that will assist the police in bringing about the arrest of the perpetrators."

The most recent shooting appeared to target the law office of state Senator Moe Maestas on Thursday morning. Multiple shots were heard, but there was no damage to the building, according to a press release.

Later Thursday night, APD said in a statement that it was looking into a fifth shooting at the former campaign office of New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez. According to APD, multiple shots were detected in the area in the early morning of Dec. 10. Torrez was not occupying the office at the time, having moved out following the election in November, police said.

"APD officers collected evidence at the time of the shooting. The evidence is now being evaluated in connection with the shootings related to four other local, elected officials in Albuquerque," the department said.

Despite the close call with Lopez's daughter, no one has been injured in the shootings, Medina said.

"Every time someone fires a gun into a home or business, there is a potential for tragedy," Medina said. "Our detectives are working overtime to track down the offender or offenders and hold them responsible."

Keller said in a statement released Thursday afternoon that he had personally spoken with all four officials and that his administration was "working with them and other elected officials" to "help them feel safe and be safe."

"Our elected officials have chosen to serve, they should never be made to feel in danger in the comfort of their own homes," Keller said.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Military to change names of some bases
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/military-bases-confederate-generals-name-changes-beginning/
GIST	The Pentagon has directed the military to proceed with plans to rename nine Army bases and hundreds of other items whose names honor the Confederacy.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin previously approved the recommendations submitted by the congressionally-mandated Naming Commission, and Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William A. LaPlante on Thursday instructed the military to begin the renaming process.

The Defense Department must implement the commission's recommendations by the end of the year. Renaming ceremonies for the nine bases named after Confederate generals will take place over the course of the year, officials say, but work to take down Confederate iconography elsewhere has already begun.

West Point announced it would start [implementing the commission's recommendations](#) over the academy's winter break by removing a portrait of Robert E. Lee in Confederate uniform, a bust of Lee, and a bronze triptych that has an image of a hooded Ku Klux Klan member.

The recommendations in the Naming Commission's final report specified new names for nine bases:

- Fort Benning, Ga. – rename Fort Moore after Lt. Gen. Hal and Julia Moore.
- Fort Bragg, N.C. – rename Fort Liberty after the value of liberty.
- Fort Gordon, Ga. – rename Fort Eisenhower after General of the Army Dwight Eisenhower.
- Fort A.P. Hill, Va. – rename Fort Walker after Dr. Mary Walker.
- Fort Hood, Texas – rename Fort Cavazos after Gen. Richard Cavazos.
- Fort Lee, Va. – rename Fort Gregg-Adams after Lt. Gen. Arthur Gregg and Lt. Col. Charity Adams.
- Fort Pickett, Va. – rename Fort Barfoot after Tech. Sgt. Van T. Barfoot.
- Fort Polk, La. – rename Fort Johnson after Sgt. William Henry Johnson.
- Fort Rucker, Ala. – rename Fort Novosel after Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael J. Novosel, Sr.

The bases are the largest items the Naming Commission recommends renaming, but it has also listed [more than 1,000 items](#) in the military's inventory that should be renamed, removed, or modified.

The commission recommended specific new names only for the bases but has provided a list of possible names the services can choose from when renaming other items. That list includes names like former Secretary of State Colin Powell and recent Medal of Honor recipient Ralph Puckett.

The Naming Commission estimated it would cost \$62.5 million to implement all of the changes.

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HEADLINE	01/05 WHO: new variant most transmissible yet
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/sounds-alarm-new-covid-variant-transmissible/story?id=96236451
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization is warning that a new omicron subvariant known as XBB.1.5 is the most transmissible strain to date.</p> <p>As COVID-19 hospitalizations rise in some parts of the Northeast -- where the subvariant makes up about 75% of new cases, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- so are concerns about how to mitigate a potential surge following large holiday gatherings.</p> <p>In the past few years, the post-holiday rise in COVID numbers was typically attributed to large gatherings and the colder weather bringing people indoors. Experts said it remains to be seen how much XBB.1.5 may be contributing to the most recent rise in hospitalizations.</p> <p>"We don't fully know what this variant is doing in the population, especially since every time a new variant emerges it's not happening in a bubble ... so it's very difficult to tease apart what might be driving, for instance, increases in hospitalizations," said Dr. John Brownstein, an ABC News contributor and chief innovation officer at Boston Children's Hospital.</p> <p>Very little is known about this new subvariant, but some preliminary research indicates that it may be more immune evasive and contagious than previous omicron variants.</p>

"We are concerned about [XBB.1.5's] growth advantage" in Europe and the U.S. Northeast, said Maria Van Kerkhove, the World Health Organization's COVID-19 technical lead, in a press conference Wednesday. XBB.1.5 had rapidly replaced other circulating variants in those areas, she added.

Scientists still do not know if the subvariant causes more severe illness or leads to more adverse outcomes like long COVID.

Researchers are also still studying how well vaccines will hold up against XBB.1.5. They say the updated bivalent booster shot remains the best way to protect yourself.

"Towards the end of last year, the CDC came out with data showing that those who got vaccinated and boosted with the bivalent had an almost 20-fold decreased risk of dying and severe illness," Dr. Peter Hotez, co-director of Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development and dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, told ABC News. "The problem is that was all before XBB.1.5."

Older adults, immunocompromised people and those with certain medical conditions are still most at-risk for severe illness and death.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration pulled the last remaining monoclonal antibody in end of November, leaving antiviral therapies such as Paxlovid as the preferred treatment for at-risk adults who haven't been hospitalized. But experts say not enough people are taking advantage of the medication.

"Getting the word out both to individuals, as well as primary care physicians, about the importance of getting Paxlovid is really of great importance," Hotez said.

White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha explained in a thread on Twitter that the federal government was continuing to track XBB.1.5 and other variants closely, while providing support for access to updated vaccines, free tests and treatment and improved ventilation and filtration in buildings.

"I think the jury's still out. But I think we know how to mitigate these surges with vaccines, with testing, with the practices we've engaged in throughout the pandemic. There's no reason to expect that this is going to completely derail our ability to contain this virus," Brownstein said.

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HEADLINE	01/05 China sharing enough Covid information?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explainer-china-sharing-covid-19-information-96257621
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan -- As COVID-19 rips through China, other countries and the World Health Organization are calling on its government to share more comprehensive data on the outbreak. Some even say many of the numbers it's reporting are meaningless.</p> <p>Without basic data like the number of deaths, infections and severe cases, governments elsewhere have instituted virus testing requirements for travelers from China. Beijing has said the measures aren't science-based and threatened countermeasures.</p> <p>Of greatest concern is whether new variants will emerge from the mass infection unfolding in China and spread to other countries. The delta and omicron variants developed in places that also had large outbreaks, which can be a breeding ground for new variants.</p> <p>Here's a look at what's going on with China's COVID-19 data:</p> <p>— WHAT IS CHINA SHARING AND NOT SHARING?</p> <p>Chinese health authorities publish a daily count of new cases, severe cases and deaths, but those numbers include only officially confirmed cases and use a very narrow definition of COVID-related deaths.</p>

China is most certainly doing their own sampling studies but just not sharing them, said Ray Yip, who founded the U.S. Centers for Disease Control office in China.

The nationwide tally for Thursday was 9,548 new cases and five deaths, but some local governments are releasing much higher estimates just for their jurisdictions. Zhejiang, a province on the east coast, said Tuesday it was seeing about 1 million new cases a day.

If a variant emerges in an outbreak, it's found through genetic sequencing of the virus.

Since the pandemic started, China has shared 4,144 sequences with GISAID, a global platform for [coronavirus](#) data. That's only 0.04% of its reported number of cases — a rate more than 100 times less than the United States and nearly four times less than neighboring Mongolia.

WHAT IS KNOWN AND WHAT CAN BE FIGURED OUT?

So far, no new variants have shown up in the sequences shared by China. The versions fueling infections in China “closely resemble” those that have been seen in other parts of the world since July, GISAID said. Dr. Gagandeep Kang, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College of Vellore in India, agreed, saying there wasn’t anything particularly worrisome in the data so far.

That hasn't stopped at least 10 countries — including the U.S., Canada, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, the U.K., France, Spain and Italy — from announcing virus testing requirements for passengers from China. The European Union strongly encouraged all its member states to do so this week.

Health officials have defended the testing as a surveillance measure that helps fill an information gap from China. This means countries can get a read on any changes in the virus through testing, even if they don’t have complete data from China.

“We don’t need China to study that, all we have to do is to test all the people coming out of China,” said Yip, the former public health official.

Canada and Belgium said they will look for viral particles in wastewater on planes arriving from China. “It is like an early warning system for authorities to anticipate whether there’s a surge of infections coming in,” said Dr. Khoo Yoong Khean, a scientific officer at the Duke-NUS Centre for Outbreak Preparedness in Singapore.

IS CHINA SHARING ENOUGH INFORMATION?

Chinese officials have repeatedly said they are sharing information, pointing to the sequences given to GISAID and meetings with the WHO.

But WHO officials have repeatedly asked for more — not just on genetic sequencing but also on hospitalizations, ICU admissions and deaths. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed concern this week about the risk to life in China.

“Data remains essential for WHO to carry out regular, rapid and robust risk assessments of the global situation,” the head of the U.N. health agency said.

The Chinese government often holds information from its own public, particularly anything that reflects negatively on the ruling Communist Party. State media have shied away from the dire reports of a spike in cremations and people racing from hospital to hospital to try to get treatment as the health system reaches capacity. Government officials have accused foreign media of hyping the situation.

Khoo, noting that South Africa’s early warning about omicron led to bans on travelers from the country, said there is a need to foster an environment where countries can share data without fear of repercussions.

HEADLINE	01/05 Major storm slams West Coast: floods, wind
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/176000-customers-power-storm-hits-west-coast/story?id=96238218
GIST	<p>A major storm is hitting the West Coast with flood, high wind and heavy snow alerts in effect for California, Nevada, Utah, Oregon and Washington state.</p> <p>More than 88,000 customers are without power in California.</p> <p>Although the heaviest of the rain has ended, unsettled weather continues across California and a flood watch remains in effect.</p> <p>A winter storm warning is in place for the mountains outside of Los Angeles, where up to a foot of snow is possible.</p> <p>In California, winds gusts up to 132 mph were reported in Alpine Meadows and up to 60 mph at San Francisco International Airport.</p> <p>Heavy rain will continue Thursday in California and then most of the state will catch a break on Friday before more rain arrives over the weekend and into early next week.</p> <p>Winds in Los Angeles County gusted up to 87 mph and up to 63 mph on the Santa Barbara County coast.</p> <p>The highest rainfall totals in California over the last 24 hours were 5 inches in Potter Valley, 3.98 inches in Valley Christian, 4.67 inches in Los Angeles County and 1.8 inches in Beverly Hills.</p> <p>San Francisco picked up more than half of its annual rainfall in just 30 days.</p> <p>Winter storm warnings are in effect for the Sierras, where there could be up to 4 feet of snow.</p> <p>Heavy snow will continue to fall in the Sierras and mountains of Los Angeles later Thursday while snow will also be moving into the central Rockies.</p> <p>Additional Atmospheric Rivers will move in this weekend and into next weekend. More rounds of flooding rain, winds and mountain snow are to be expected. The northern and central part of the state will likely get the brunt of it.</p> <p>Elsewhere, there were 23 reported tornadoes across the South.</p> <p>Seven tornadoes were confirmed in Illinois alone, making it the biggest tornado outbreak for the state since 1989.</p> <p>To the north, up to 15 inches of snow fell in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, breaking a daily record and making it the snowiest start to January in five years.</p> <p>With more than 45 inches of snow so far this season, this is the snowiest start to winter in almost 30 years at Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport.</p>
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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/05 First LastPass, now Slack, CircleCi; next?
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/01/first-lastpass-now-slack-and-circleci-the-hacks-go-on-and-will-likely-worsen/

GIST

In the past 24 hours, the world has learned of serious breaches hitting chat service Slack and software testing and delivery company CircleCI, though giving the companies' opaque wording—"security issue" and "security incident," respectively—you'd be forgiven for thinking these events were minor.

The compromises—in Slack's case, the theft of employee token credentials and for CircleCI, the possible exposure of all customer secrets it stores—come two weeks after password manager LastPass disclosed its own [security failure](#): the theft of customers' password vaults containing sensitive data in both encrypted and clear text form. It's not clear if all three breaches are related, but that's certainly a possibility.

The most concerning of the two new breaches is the one hitting CircleCI. On Wednesday evening, the company reported a "security incident" that prompted it to advise customers to rotate "all secrets" they store on the service. The alert also informed customers that it had invalidated their Project API tokens, an event requiring them to go through the hassle of [replacing them](#).

CircleCI says it's used by more than [1 million developers](#) in support of [30,000 organizations](#) and runs nearly 1 million daily jobs. The potential exposure of all those secrets—which could be login credentials, access tokens, and who knows what else—could prove disastrous for the security of the entire Internet.

A lack of transparency

CircleCI is still tight-lipped about precisely what happened. Its [advisory](#) never used the words "breach," "compromise," or "intrusion," but that's almost certainly what happened. Exhibit A is the statement: "At this point, we are confident that there are no unauthorized actors active in our systems," suggesting that network intruders were active earlier. Exhibit B: the advice that customers check internal logs for unauthorized access between December 21 and January 4.

Taking the statements together, it's not a stretch to suspect threat actors were active inside CircleCI's systems for two weeks. That's plenty of time to collect an unimaginable amount of some of the industry's most sensitive data.

Slack's [advisory](#), meanwhile, is similarly opaque. It's dated December 31, but the Internet Archives didn't see it until Thursday, five days later. It's clear Slack wasn't in a hurry for the event to become widely known.

Like the CircleCI disclosure, the Slack alert also steers clear of concrete language and instead uses the passive phrase "were stolen and misused" without saying how. Adding to the lack of forthrightness: The company embedded the HTML tag in the post in an attempt to prevent search engines from indexing the alert.

After obtaining the Slack employee tokens, the threat actor misused them to gain access to the company's external GitHub account. From there, the intruders downloaded private code repositories. The advisory stresses that its customers weren't affected and that "the threat actor did not access other areas of Slack's environment, including the production environment, and they did not access other Slack resources or customer data."

Customers should take the statement with a generous helping of brine. Remember the LastPass [advisory from August](#)? It, too, used the opaque phrase "security incident" and said "no customer data was accessed," only to reveal the true extent on the last major business day of 2022. It wouldn't be surprising if Slack or CircleCI updated its advisories to disclose further access to customer data or more sensitive parts of their networks.

Hacking the supply chain

It's possible, too, that some or all of these breaches are related. The Internet relies on a massive ecosystem of content delivery networks, authentication services, software development tool makers, and other companies. Threat actors frequently hack one company and use the data or access they obtain to breach that company's customers or partners.

That was the case with the [August breach](#) of security provider Twilio that led to the compromise of Okta, Signal, DoorDash, and more than [130 other companies](#).

Something similar played out in the last days of 2020 when hackers [compromised Solar Winds](#), gained control of its software build system, and used it to infect roughly [40 Solar Winds customers](#).

For now, people should brace themselves for additional disclosures from companies they rely on. Checking internal system logs for suspicious entries, turning on multifactor authentication, and patching network systems are always good ideas, but given the current events, those precautions should be expedited. It's also worth checking logs for any contact with the IP address 54.145.167.181, which one security practitioner [said](#) was connected to the CircleCI breach.

People should also remember that despite companies' assurances of transparency, their terse, carefully worded disclosures are designed to conceal more than they reveal.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Blind Eagle hackers return w/refined toolset
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/blind-eagle-hackers-return-with-refined.html
GIST	<p>A financially motivated threat actor tracked as Blind Eagle has resurfaced with a refined toolset and an elaborate infection chain as part of its attacks targeting organizations in Colombia and Ecuador.</p> <p>Check Point's latest research offers new insights into the Spanish-speaking group's tactics and techniques, including the use of sophisticated tools and government-themed lures to activate the killchain.</p> <p>Also tracked under the name APT-C-36, Blind Eagle is notable for its narrow geographical focus and launching indiscriminate attacks against South American nations since at least 2018.</p> <p>Blind Eagle's operations have been documented by Trend Micro in September 2021, uncovering a spear-phishing campaign primarily aimed at Colombian entities that's designed to deliver a commodity malware known as BitRAT, with a lesser focus towards targets in Ecuador, Spain, and Panama.</p> <p>Attack chains commence with phishing emails containing a booby-trapped link that, when clicked, leads to the deployment of an open source trojan named Quasar RAT with the ultimate goal of gaining access to the victim's bank accounts.</p> <p>Some of targeted banks consists of Banco AV Villas, Banco Caja Social, Banco de Bogotá, Banco Popular, Bancoomeva, BBVA, Colpatría, Davivienda, and TransUnion.</p> <p>Blind Eagle Hackers</p> <p>Should the email recipient be located outside of Colombia, the attack sequence is aborted and the victim is redirected to the official website of the Colombian border control agency, Migración Colombia.</p> <p>A related campaign singling out both Colombia and Ecuador masquerades as the latter's Internal Revenue Service (SRI) and makes use of a similar geo-blocking technology to filter out requests originating from other countries.</p> <p>This attack, rather than dropping a RAT malware, employs a more complex multi-stage process that abuses the legitimate mshta.exe binary to execute VBScript embedded inside an HTML file to ultimately download two Python scripts.</p> <p>The first of the two, ByAV2.py, is an in-memory loader engineered to run a Meterpreter payload in DLL format. mp.py is also a Meterpreter artifact, only it's programmed in Python, indicating that the threat actor could be using one of them as a redundant method to retain backdoor access to the host.</p>

	<p>"Blind Eagle is a strange bird among APT groups," the researchers concluded. "Judging by its toolset and usual operations, it is clearly more interested in cybercrime and monetary gain than in espionage."</p> <p>The development comes days after Qualys disclosed that an unknown adversary is leveraging personal information stolen from a Colombian cooperative bank to craft phishing emails that result in the deployment of BitRAT.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 New decryptor for MegaCortex
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/security-industry-megacortex/
GIST	<p>Security industry stakeholders have joined forces again to offer ransomware victims a way to mitigate the worst impacts of a compromise, with a new decryptor for MegaCortex.</p> <p>The new decryption tool will allow victims of the variant to recover their files for free.</p> <p>It was announced by Bitdefender, although the security vendor acknowledged that the tool was built in cooperation with Europol, the No More Ransom Project, the Zürich Public Prosecutor's Office and the Zürich Cantonal Police.</p> <p>Interestingly, the anti-malware vendor's announcement cited news from October 2021, when 12 individuals were arrested in connection with the Dharma, MegaCortex and LockerGoga ransomware families.</p> <p>It's likely that the arrest of what Europol described as "high-value targets" ultimately led to the development of the MegaCortex decryptor.</p> <p>A statement from the Zürich Public Prosecutor's Office back in September 2022 revealed as much, claiming that investigators had been able to recover multiple private keys used by the threat actors.</p> <p>"These keys enable damaged companies and institutions to restore data previously encrypted with the LockerGoga or MegaCortex malware," it explained.</p> <p>"In cooperation with Europol, the No More Ransom Project and the company Bitdefender, a tool is provided that supports the victims in decrypting LockerGoga. This is available at www.nomoreransom.org. MegaCortex decryption tool will be released soon."</p> <p>The LockerGoga decryptor was released in September last year when that announcement was made.</p> <p>Together, the three variants are estimated to have compromised 1800 victims in 71 countries.</p> <p>MegaCortex was first spotted back in May 2019. Victims were displayed a ransom note containing various references to cult '90s film The Matrix, and the variant's name echoes that of the company (MetaCortex) where the movie's hero, Neo, works.</p> <p>Some targeted corporate victims were asked to pay multimillion-dollar ransoms for a decryption key, with the group also one of the first to use double extortion tactics by exfiltrating data and threatening to leak it.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 SpyNote Android malware infections surge
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/spynote-android-malware-infections-surge-after-source-code-leak/
GIST	<p>The Android malware family tracked as SpyNote (or SpyMax) has had a sudden increase in detections in the final quarter of 2022, which is attributed to a source code leak of one of its latest, known as 'CypherRat.'</p>

'CypherRat' combined SpyNote's spying capabilities, such as offering remote access, GPS tracking, and device status and activity updates, with banking trojan features that impersonate banking institutions to steal account credentials.

CypherRat was sold via private Telegram channels from August 2021 until October 2022, when its author decided to publish its source code on GitHub, following a string of scamming incidents on hacking forums that impersonated the project.

Threat actors quickly snatched the malware's source code and launched their own campaigns. Almost immediately, custom variants appeared that targeted reputable banks like HSBC and Deutsche Bank.

In parallel, other actors opted to masquerade their versions of CypherRat as Google Play, WhatsApp, and Facebook, targeting a wider audience.

This activity was observed by [ThreatFabric analysts](#), who warn about the possibility of CypherRat becoming an even more widespread threat.

SpyNote malware features

All SpyNote variants in circulation rely on requesting access to Android's Accessibility Service to be allowed to install new apps, intercept SMS messages (for 2FA bypass), snoop on calls, and record video and audio on the device.

ThreatFabric lists the following as "standout" features:

- Use the Camera API to record and send videos from the device to the C2 server
- GPS and network location tracking information
- Stealing Facebook and Google account credentials.
- Use Accessibility (A11y) to extract codes from Google Authenticator.
- Use keylogging powered by Accessibility services to steal banking credentials.

To hide its malicious code from scrutiny, the latest versions of SpyNote employ string obfuscation and use commercial packers to wrap the APKs.

Moreover, all information exfiltrated from SpyNote to its C2 server is obfuscated using base64 to hide the host.

Threat actors currently use CypherRat as a banking trojan, but the malware could also be used as spyware in low-volume targeted espionage operations.

ThreatFabric believes that SpyNote will continue to constitute a risk for Android users and estimates that various forks of the malware will appear as we head deeper into 2023.

While ThreatFabric has not shared how these malicious apps are being distributed, they are likely spread through phishing sites, third-party Android app sites, and social media.

For this reason, users are advised to be very cautious during the installation of new apps, especially if those come from outside Google Play, and reject requests to grant permissions to access the Accessibility Service.

Unfortunately, despite Google's [continual efforts](#) to stop the abuse of Accessibility Service APIs by Android malware, there are still [ways to bypass](#) the imposed restrictions.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Rackspace: attack accessed email data
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/rackspace-customer-email-data-accessed-in-ransomware-attack/

GIST

Rackspace revealed on Thursday that attackers behind last month's incident accessed some of its customers' Personal Storage Table (PST) files which can contain a wide range of information, including emails, calendar data, contacts, and tasks.

This update comes after Rackspace confirmed that the Play ransomware operation was behind the cyberattack that took down its hosted Microsoft Exchange environment in December.

As discovered during the now-finished investigation led by cybersecurity firm Crowdstrike, the attackers gained access to the personal storage folders of 27 Rackspace customers.

However, the company added that there is no evidence that they viewed the contents of the accessed backup files or misused the information.

"Of the nearly 30,000 customers on the Hosted Exchange email environment at the time of the attack, the forensic investigation determined the threat actor accessed a Personal Storage Table ('PST') of 27 Hosted Exchange customers," Rackspace said in an incident report update shared with BleepingComputer in advance.

"We have already communicated our findings to these customers proactively, and importantly, according to Crowdstrike, there is no evidence that the threat actor actually viewed, obtained, misused, or disseminated any of the 27 Hosted Exchange customers' emails or data in the PSTs in any way."

"Customers who were not contacted directly by the Rackspace team can be assured that their PST data was not accessed by the threat actor."

While RackSpace says there is no evidence that the threat actors accessed customer data, history has shown that this invariably is not the case.

Additionally, even if the data may not be leaked if a ransom is paid or for some other reason, it is very likely that customer data was at least viewed during the attack.

Affected clients can download some recovered PST data

Since discovering the attack on December 2 and confirming the resulting outage was caused by a ransomware attack, Rackspace has been offering affected customers free licenses to migrate their email from its Hosted Exchange platform to Microsoft 365.

The cloud computing provider also provides affected customers with download links to recovered historic mailbox data (containing email messages before December 2) through its customer portal via an automated queue.

"As a reminder, we are proactively notifying customers for whom we have recovered greater than 50% of their mailboxes," the company said.

"We will continue working to recover all data possible as planned, however, in parallel, we are developing an on-demand solution for those customers who do still wish to download their data. We expect that the on-demand solution will be available within two weeks."

BleepingComputer asked a Rackspace spokesperson earlier today if the email data is being restored from Rackspace's backups or with the help of a decryption tool provided by the Play ransomware attackers. We will update the article when we have an answer.

Rackspace added in today's update that its Hosted Exchange environment would be discontinued, saying that it was already planning to migrate customers to Microsoft 365 even before the December ransomware attack.

	<p>"Finally, the Hosted Exchange email environment will not be rebuilt as a go-forward service offering," Rackspace said.</p> <p>"Even prior to the recent security incident, the Hosted Exchange email environment had already been planned for migration to Microsoft 365, which has a more flexible pricing model, as well as more modern features and functionality."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Bluebottle continues bank heist assault
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/bluebottle-bank-heist-assault-fresh-lol-tactics
GIST	<p>A criminal group, which has already stolen nearly \$11 million by specializing in targeted attacks against the financial sector, has French-speaking African banks in its crosshairs in a recent campaign that demonstrates an evolution in tactics, researchers have found.</p> <p>Bluebottle, aka OPERA1ER, compromised three different financial institutions in three separate African nations between mid-July and September, affecting multiple machines in all three organizations, researchers from Symantec revealed in a blog post published on Jan. 5.</p> <p>Though it's unclear if the group was able to capitalize financially on the activity, it's significant because the different payloads and other tactics that Bluebottle used in the campaign vary from previous offensives by the group, Sylvester Segura, Symantec threat intelligence analyst, tells Dark Reading.</p> <p>In particular, Bluebottle used commodity malware GuLoader and malicious ISO files in the initial stages of the attack — which it hasn't done before — as well as abused kernel drivers with a signed driver that has been linked to other attacks such as ransomware, Segura says.</p> <p>These "all indicate the Bluebottle group is keeping up to date with the tools and techniques that other threat actors are currently using," he says. "They may not be the most advanced, but this latest activity proves they are following attacker trends in tooling and techniques."</p> <p>Indeed, the use of signed drivers in particular shows that Bluebottle — a financially motivated group first observed in 2019 — is aiming to up its game in this latest spate of activity, forcing enterprises to do the same in terms of defensive maneuvers, Segura says.</p> <p>"More and more 'less advanced' attackers are aware of the impact they can have by disabling detection solutions through various means such as using signed drivers," he notes. "To prevent the trust we put in software like signed drivers from becoming a single point of failure, enterprises need to employ as many layers of detection and protection as they reasonably can."</p> <p>Keeping Up With Bluebottle</p> <p>Group-IB first began tracking Bluebottle, which it calls OPERA1ER, in activity that spanned from mid-2019 to 2021. During this period, the group stole at least \$11 million in the course of 30 targeted attacks, researchers said in a report published in November. The group typically infiltrates a financial organization and moves laterally, scooping up credentials that it can use for fraudulent transfers and other funds-stealing activity.</p> <p>The activity that Symantec observed started in mid-July, when researchers spotted job-themed malware on one of the infected systems, which they believe could have been the result of a spear-phishing campaign — though they said they are not certain of the group's initial point of entry.</p> <p>"These likely acted as lures," researchers wrote in the post. "In some cases, the malware was named to trick the user into thinking it was a PDF file."</p>

Symantec researchers linked the group to the previous OPERA1ER activity reported by Group-1B because it shared the same domain, used similar tools, included no custom malware, and also targeted Francophone nations in Africa, they said.

Living Off the Land

After noticing the job-themed malware, researchers then observed the deployment of a downloader before detecting the commercial SharpHound hacktool as well as a tool called fakelogonscreen, researchers said. Then, about three weeks after this initial compromise, researchers saw attackers using a command prompt and PsExec for lateral movement.

"It appears the attackers were 'hands on keyboard' at this point of the attack," researchers wrote in the post, using various dual-use and [living-off-the-land \(LotL\) tools](#) for a number of purposes during their occupation of the network.

These tools included Quser for user discovery, Ping for checking Internet connectivity, Ngrok for network tunneling, Net localgroup/add for adding users, the Fortinet VPN client most likely for a secondary access channel, Xcopy to copy RDP wrapper files, and Netsh to open port 3389 in the firewall, among several others.

As previously mentioned, Bluebottle also used commodity tools GuLoader as well as Mimikatz, Revealer Keylogger, Backdoor.Cobalt, Netwire RAT, and the malicious DLL and driver for killing processes during their activity, along with "multiple other unknown files," the researchers wrote.

Some of the tools — such as GuLoader — were deployed across all three victims; other activity linking the three victims included the use of the same .NET downloader, malicious driver, and at least one overlapping transfer[.]sh URL, they said.

Researchers observed the last activity on the compromised network in September; however, the Ngrok tunneling tool remained on the network until November, they said.

How Enterprises Can Respond

Since Bluebottle uses mainly commodity RATs and other malware in its activity, enterprises can mitigate attacks from this threat group by ensuring they have good endpoint protection against such threats, Segura says.

"Furthermore, an extended detection and response solution should also help detect their abuse of living off the land tools like PsExec during attempted lateral movement," he says.

Since Bluebottle typically goes after credentials immediately in its attacks for financial gain, multifactor authentication can also go a long way in helping enterprises protect accounts and monitor for suspicious account activity, Segura says.

Other steps enterprises can take to counter activity from Bluebottle specifically include allowing applications that "will help prevent the malicious use of dual-use tools like Ngrok, which they use for hiding their presence," he says.

"Finally, training employees to look out for phishing and other malicious emails is going to be crucial to prevent a group like this from intruding in the first place," Segura adds.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Cryptocurrency hacks spiked in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/cryptocurrency-hacks-2022/?&web_view=true
GIST	Losses of cryptocurrency assets due to hacks rose to \$3.7 billion last year, a 58 percent increase over the \$2.3 billion that cybercriminals stole from investors and exchanges in 2021, according to a report released Thursday by ImmuneFi, a web3 security testing platform.

The [firm's analysis found](#) that hacks accounted for more than 95 percent of all cryptocurrency theft. Frauds and scams made up the rest of the losses. Researchers at Immunefi tracked 134 specific hacking incidents in 2022, an increase from 104 hacks in 2021.

The findings aren't surprising to those that have followed a banner year in cryptocurrency hacks. Analysts predicted early on that this would be a record year for cryptocurrency hackers. By October, hackers had already grossed \$3 billion from 125 hacks, [according to researchers at Chainalysis](#).

One of the biggest hacks was a \$625 million theft of cryptocurrency assets from Ronin Bridge, a tool that allows users to move currency between blockchains. The U.S. government later [attributed the attack to North Korean hackers](#), underscoring growing national security concerns with the industry's weak cybersecurity practices.

Researchers at the blockchain analytics firm Elliptic [also tied](#) North Korean hackers to a \$100 million hack of Harmony Bridge in June.

The massive losses have prompted scrutiny from U.S. officials about how the illicit use of cryptocurrency poses a national security threat. The Treasury Department responded in August by sanctioning mixer Tornado Cash [citing use by North Koreans in part](#). And in September the Justice Department's National Cryptocurrency Enforcement Team established a nationwide network of federal prosecutors focused on combatting the illicit use of digital assets.

The Immunefi report also found that decentralized finance projects continued to be the main hacking victim in 2022. The hacks are a wake-up call for cryptocurrency developers, especially of bridge projects that carry enormous amounts of capital, said Adrian Hetman, tech lead at Immunefi.

"Two years ago, I wouldn't even think about some hacker reaching over \$100 million," said Hetman. "But in the last two years, we've seen multiple cases like that."

There are signs, however, that cryptocurrency companies are starting to take cybersecurity more seriously. Firms specializing in auditing code for cryptocurrency projects [reported booming business in 2022](#). Immunefi found that cryptocurrency bounty payments through its platform were up from around \$13 million in 2021 to just over \$52 million in 2022.

Despite being less lucrative than hacks, cryptocurrency scams and frauds still present a serious problem for U.S. consumers. In June, the Federal Trade Commission [reported](#) that losses from cryptocurrency fraud climbed to more than \$1 billion between January 2021 through March 2022.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Study: hackers sought PII the most
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/data-security/hackers-went-after-personally-identifiable-information-the-most-study-says?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A recently released study that analyzed the top 100 breaches from July 2021 to July 2022 showed that hackers went after personally identifiable information 42.7% of the time.</p> <p>Out of all of the types of data available for cybercriminals to steal — credit card info, passwords, source code, etc. — the authors of the Imperva study said that PII is the most valuable since criminals can compile more PII from the dark web to then engage in harder to prevent fraud or full-on identity theft.</p> <p>For the analysis, Imperva looked at publicly available sources from the web, breach reports, hackers' forums, analysis of stolen database dumps and information from Imperva's own honeypots.</p> <p>What they found was that 27.1% of data breaches were caused by hackers. But Imperva researchers said what struck them most was that the two reasons that tied for second when it comes to root causes —</p>

unsecured databases and social engineering at 14.6% — are fairly straightforward to mitigate: “A publicly open service increases the risk of a breach to happen, but in most cases, this is not a failure of security practices; it is rather a complete absence of a security posture,” they wrote.

Ransomware followed as the fourth most common cause of a breach at 10.4%, and third parties caused 7.2% of breaches.

Finance, professional services, healthcare and public administration were the top four industries that recorded the most breaches during the analysis.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Russian spies exploited USB infections
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/russia-turla-fsb-usb-infection/
GIST	<p>THE RUSSIAN CYBERESPIONAGE group known as Turla became infamous in 2008 as the hackers behind agent.btz, a virulent piece of malware that spread through US Department of Defense systems, gaining widespread access via infected USB drives plugged in by unsuspecting Pentagon staffers. Now, 15 years later, the same group appears to be trying a new twist on that trick: hijacking the USB infections of <i>other</i> hackers to piggyback on their infections and stealthily choose their spying targets.</p> <p>Today, cybersecurity firm Mandiant revealed that it has found an incident in which, it says, Turla's hackers—widely believed to work in the service of Russia's FSB intelligence agency—gained access to victim networks by registering the expired domains of nearly decade-old cybercriminal malware that spread via infected USB drives. As a result, Turla was able to take over the command-and-control servers for that malware, hermit-crab style, and sift through its victims to find ones worthy of espionage targeting.</p> <p>That hijacking technique appears designed to let Turla stay undetected, hiding inside other hackers' footprints while combing through a vast collection of networks. And it shows how the Russian group's methods have evolved and become far more sophisticated over the past decade and a half, says John Hultquist, who leads intelligence analysis at Mandiant. “Because the malware already proliferated through USB, Turla can leverage that without exposing themselves. Rather than use their own USB tools like agent.btz, they can sit on someone else's,” Hultquist says. “They're piggybacking on other people's operations. It's a really clever way of doing business.”</p> <p>Mandiant's discovery of Turla's new technique first came to light in September of last year, when the company's incident responders found a curious breach of a network in Ukraine, a country that's become a primary focus of all Kremlin intel services after Russia's catastrophic invasion last February. Several computers on that network had been infected after someone inserted a USB drive into one of their ports and double-clicked on a malicious file on the drive that had been disguised as a folder, installing a piece of malware called Andromeda.</p> <p>Andromeda is a relatively common banking trojan that cybercriminals have used to steal victims' credentials since as early as 2013. But on one of the infected machines, Mandiant's analysts saw that the Andromeda sample had quietly downloaded two other, more interesting pieces of malware. The first, a reconnaissance tool called Kopiluwak, has been previously used by Turla; the second piece of malware, a backdoor known as Quietcanary that compressed and siphoned carefully selected data off the target computer, has been used exclusively by Turla in the past. “That was a red flag for us,” says Mandiant threat intelligence analyst Gabby Roncone.</p> <p>When Mandiant looked at the command-and-control servers for the Andromeda malware that had started that infection chain, its analysts saw that the domain used to control the Andromeda sample—whose name was a vulgar taunt of the antivirus industry—had actually expired and been reregistered in early 2022. Looking at other Andromeda samples and their command-and-control domains, Mandiant saw that at least two more expired domains had been reregistered. In total, those domains connected to</p>

hundreds of Andromeda infections, all of which Turla could sort through to find subjects worthy of their spying.

“By doing this you can basically lay under the radar much better. You’re not spamming a bunch of people, you’re letting someone else spam a bunch of people,” says Hultquist. “Then you started picking and choosing which targets are worth your time and your exposure.”

In fact, Mandiant only found that single instance in Ukraine of the hijacked Andromeda infection distributing Turla’s malware. But the company suspects that there were likely more. Hultquist warns there’s no reason to believe the stealthy targeted spying that piggybacked off Andromeda’s USB infections would be limited to just one target, or even to just Ukraine. “Turla has a global intelligence collection mandate,” he says.

Turla has a long history of using clever tricks to hide the control of its malware, and even to hijack the control of other hackers, as Mandiant saw in this most recent case. Cybersecurity firm Kaspersky revealed in 2015 that Turla had [taken control of satellite internet connections](#) to obscure the location of its command-and-control servers. In 2019, Britain’s GCHQ intelligence agency [warned that Turla had silently commandeered Iranian hackers’ servers](#) to conceal themselves and confuse detectives trying to identify them.

Those innovative techniques have made the group a particular obsession for many cybersecurity researchers, who have [traced its fingerprints all the way back to Moonlight Maze](#), one of the first-ever state-sponsored hacking campaigns, discovered in the late 1990s. Turla’s agent.btz thumbdrive malware represented another historic moment for the group: It resulted in a Pentagon initiative called Operation Buckshot Yankee, designed to vastly upgrade the Defense Department’s cybersecurity after the group’s embarrassing USB-based breach.

Mandiant’s discovery of another, stealthier USB-based hacking technique in Turla’s hands should serve as a reminder that even now, 15 years later, that USB-based intrusion vector has hardly disappeared. Plug an infected drive into your USB port today, it seems, and you may be offering an invitation to not only undiscerning cybercriminals, but also a far more sophisticated breed of operative hiding behind them.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Ban teens from using TikTok in schools?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/tiktok-bans-experts-warn-other-apps-also-risky-teens-social-media-facebook-twitter-snapchat-privacy-concerns-internet-safety#
GIST	<p>(TND) — Louisiana's schools chief this week joined the growing chorus of voices that are calling for a ban of TikTok.</p> <p>Louisiana State Superintendent of Education Cade Brumley is asking school districts to ban TikTok from district-owned devices. He sent a memo to district leaders Tuesday.</p> <p>The decision is ultimately up to district officials, but Brumley said he’s hearing support for this move. His concerns are about privacy – the same concerns brought up by officials across the country.</p> <p><i>“I have to do everything within my power to protect the safety and privacy of Louisiana kids,” Brumley said Thursday. “And I just have little reason to believe that we can trust this foreign application to protect the privacy of our American kids. And so that’s the basis. That’s the basis for my decision.”</i></p> <p>TikTok is owned by a Chinese company, ByteDance Ltd.</p> <p>TikTok bans have gained momentum recently. Over 20 states now have some kind of a ban for the application on state-owned devices, and the federal government included a TikTok ban on government-issued devices in the recently approved \$1.7 trillion spending bill.</p>

The [FBI has even warned](#) that TikTok poses concerns for national security.

But should schools ban TikTok?

[Doug Levin](#), an expert in schools and cybersecurity threats, said that's at least a conversation that should be held at the local level.

He's not calling for bans, but he does think parents and local school officials should only use TikTok with eyes wide open.

"There has been some security research on the behavior of the TikTok app on the phone, and it does collect significantly more information than typical apps, including typical social media apps," Levin said. "It seeks access to all of your actions on the phone, it tracks your location, and your keystrokes, and the company has demonstrated lax internal controls about who can access that data and how they might use it."

These privacy concerns are not exclusive to TikTok, he said. But they exist "doubly so" on that platform. Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, dating apps, mobile app games, and even education apps are also often "privacy-invasive," Levin said.

Internet Safety Labs, a nonprofit software product safety testing organization, found [nearly every app children use in the classroom is exposing their personal information](#) to third parties and tech giants.

ISL evaluated 1,700 apps, including education-based apps, in hundreds of schools and found that 96% of the apps share students' personal information with third parties, typically without the knowledge or consent of the users or schools. Nearly 80% of those apps received a grade of "do not use," while the others were considered "high risk."

Another education expert is more bullish on banning TikTok.

"I would discourage schools from using any of those products, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok," said [Faith Boninger](#) of the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado.

Her group, NEPC, even [stopped using Facebook](#) several years ago out of concerns about the lack of privacy safeguards.

Boninger said TikTok's foreign ownership presents additional risks, but she added, "There are major privacy concerns with any of these products."

"I'm worried about social media use in the schools," Boninger said.

Schools widely use Facebook and Twitter.

Brumley, Louisiana's state superintendent of education, said there's a prevention aspect to banning the less-used TikTok.

Brumley not only wants to keep TikTok off school-purchased devices, but he also wants to keep schools from using TikTok accounts as a communications outlet.

None of these bans, of course, would stop teens from using TikTok on their personal cellphones.

And many of them do.

A Pew Research Center study found that [67% of teens use TikTok](#).

When asked how impactful school bans would be when teens are still using TikTok on their own phones, cybersecurity expert Levin had this answer: “Moderately.”

“There's always in every school, every day, there's a cat-and-mouse game between students and their IT departments to get access to sites and services that are blocked on school devices (and) on school networks,” Levin said.

But otherwise, if a student is using TikTok on their own device and on a cellular network, there’s not much that schools can do to stop it.

And Levin provided some context for the risks to students.

“If you're talking about the individual level for Johnny and Susie in the third grade ... the risk to those individuals specifically is probably quite low,” he said. “I think the concern is patterns of behavior, the ability to share propaganda at scale, the ability to learn more about the habits and interests of members of the American public more broadly.”

Boninger said that even if there are practical limitations to school bans in stopping teen use, they would serve as an example.

“I don't think schools should serve as a portal to that kind of thing,” she said.

As for Brumley, he made it clear his intent is to only stop the use of TikTok on school-owned devices. “Whenever we're talking about a kid and their personal device, I fully respect the role of the parent here to parent their own child,” he said.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/06 Probe: US botched drone strike in Kabul
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/us/politics/drone-civilian-deaths-afghanistan.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In the chaotic final days of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, U.S. military analysts observed a white Toyota Corolla stop at what they believed was an Islamic State compound.</p> <p>The Americans were already on edge. Three days earlier, a suicide bomber had killed scores of Afghans and 13 U.S. troops at a main gate of the Kabul airport. Now, officials had intelligence that there would be another attack there, and that it would involve a white Corolla.</p> <p>They tracked the car around Kabul for the next several hours. After it pulled into a gated courtyard near the airport, they authorized a drone strike. Hours later, U.S. officials announced they had successfully thwarted an attack.</p> <p>As reports of civilian deaths surfaced later that day, they issued statements saying they had “no indications” but would assess the claims and were investigating whether a secondary explosion may have killed civilians.</p> <p>But portions of a U.S. Central Command investigation obtained by The New York Times show that military analysts reported within minutes of the strike that civilians may have been killed, and within three hours had assessed that at least three children were killed.</p> <p>The documents also provide detailed examples of how assumptions and biases led to the deadly blunder.</p>

Military analysts wrongly concluded, for example, that a package loaded into the car contained explosives because of its “careful handling and size,” and that the driver’s “erratic route” was evidence that he was trying to evade surveillance.

The investigation was completed a week and a half after the strike and was never released, but The New York Times has obtained 66 partially redacted pages of it through a [Freedom of Information Act lawsuit](#) against Central Command.

Central Command declined to provide additional comment beyond statements it had previously made about the strike. The Pentagon previously [acknowledged that the strike was a “tragic mistake”](#) that killed 10 civilians, and told The Times that [a new action plan](#) intended to protect civilians drew on [lessons learned](#) from the incident.

Among those killed was Zemari Ahmadi, a longtime aid worker and the driver of the car.

Responding to a description of the document released to The Times, Hina Shamsi, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer representing families of victims, said the investigation “makes clear that military personnel saw what they wanted to see and not reality, which was an Afghan aid worker going about his daily life.”

The Attack

On Aug. 29, 2021, an American MQ-9 Reaper drone shot a Hellfire missile at a white Toyota Corolla in a neighborhood near the Kabul airport.

Within 20 minutes, multiple military officials and members of the strike team learned that analysts had seen possible civilian casualties in video feeds, according to their sworn statements for the investigation.

Two to three hours after the attack, analysts who had reviewed the footage frame by frame assessed that three children had been killed. An officer then shared that information with two top commanders in Afghanistan, Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, the ground force commander, and Rear Adm. Peter G. Vasely.

In sworn statements, six of nine witnesses described learning immediately after the strike that civilians were in the area and may have been killed.

Later that day, Central Command said [in a statement](#) that officials were “assessing the possibilities of civilian casualties” but had “no indications at this time.”

[An update](#) several hours later noted that powerful subsequent explosions may have caused civilian casualties but did not mention that analysts had already assessed three children were killed.

Three days later, Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, [told reporters](#) that the strike was “righteous” and had killed an ISIS facilitator as well as “others,” but who they were, “we don’t know. We’ll try to sort through all of that.”

Over the next several weeks, Pentagon officials continued to say that an ISIS target was killed in the strike, even as evidence mounted to the contrary.

On Sept. 10, [a Times investigation](#) based on video evidence and interviews with more than a dozen of Mr. Ahmadi’s co-workers and family members in Kabul found no evidence that explosives were present in the vehicle.

Mr. Ahmadi, who worked as an electrical engineer for a California-based aid group, had spent the day picking up his employer’s laptop, taking colleagues to and from work and loading canisters of water into his trunk to bring home to his family.

Officials insisted that their target had visited an ISIS “safe house,” but The Times found that the building was actually [the home of Mr. Ahmadi’s boss](#), whose laptop he was picking up.

A week after the Times investigation was published, [military officials acknowledged](#) that 10 civilians had been killed and that Mr. Ahmadi posed no threat and had no connection to ISIS.

Tracking a White Toyota

[A subsequent review](#) led by the Air Force inspector general, Lt. Gen. Sami D. Said, remains classified. But the general [acknowledged that confirmation bias](#) — a tendency to look for, analyze or remember information in a way that supports an existing belief — was an important factor in how Mr. Ahmadi became a target.

The documents obtained by The Times offer specific examples of how confirmation bias led to errors, including the military’s conclusion that the car it was looking for was the one Mr. Ahmadi was driving.

According to the documents, U.S. intelligence reports on Aug. 29 indicated that an Islamic State affiliate known as ISIS-K was planning an imminent attack on the airport that could involve suicide bombers, “rockets on timers” in the back of a vehicle, and a white Toyota Corolla.

Surveillance aircraft began tracking the white Corolla that Mr. Ahmadi was driving after it stopped at an “established ISIS-K compound.” Drones followed the car to “a second building,” where they observed Mr. Ahmadi as he “carefully loaded” a “package” into the trunk. Analysts assessed the package to be explosives “based on the careful handling and size of the material.”

Over the next several hours, analysts watched as the car made stops and dropped off “adult males,” some of whom were carrying “bags or other box-shaped objects.” At one point, an analyst described how the car was “gingerly loaded with a box carried by five adult males.”

The investigation notes the car’s other movements that day, including that it entered a mall parking garage, that “bags” and “jugs” were unloaded from the trunk, and that it stopped at a Taliban checkpoint.

Analysts said the car followed an “erratic route” that was “consistent with ISIS-K directives to avoid close circuit cameras and pre-attack posture historically demonstrated by the group.”

By the time the car pulled into an open-air garage at a house enclosed by “high walls” about one mile from the airport, military officials were ready to authorize the strike.

A man who was seen opening and closing the gate for the car was also assessed to be a part of the threat. “I personally believed this to be a likely staging location and the moving personnel to likely be a part of the overall attack plot,” one official recounted to investigators. “That was my perception, and it was largely based on both someone immediately shutting the gate behind the vehicle and someone running in the courtyard.”

At this point, new intelligence indicated the airport attack would be delayed until the following day, according to one of the investigation’s interviewees, but military personnel were concerned that they could lose the target.

Thinking that the walls would limit the blast radius from reaching pedestrians on the street, the strike team launched a Hellfire missile at the vehicle. Shortly after impact, witnesses said they saw large secondary explosions, which helped confirm investigators’ belief that the vehicle contained explosives.

But the documents present a less definitive understanding of the source of the secondary explosion.

“Conflicting opinions from experts regarding the secondary explosion makes it inconclusive regarding the source of the flame seen after the strike,” according to the report’s findings, which recommended further investigation.

[Footage of the minutes after the strike](#) obtained by The Times shows a fireball from the blast, which expands several seconds later. [On Sept. 17](#), after additional review, military officials said the explosion was probably a propane or gas tank.

The investigation refers to an additional surveillance drone not under military control that was also tracking the vehicle but does not specify what it observed. The Times confirmed that the drone was operated by the C.I.A. and observed children, possibly in the car, moments before impact, as [CNN had reported](#).

The military investigation includes recommendations for better coordination, but the documents do not mention that the C.I.A. drone observed children before impact.

“When confirmation bias was so deadly in this case, you have to ask how many other people targeted by the military over the years were also unjustly killed,” Ms. Shamsi said.

The investigation noted that [a rocket attack](#) at the airport did occur the next day, about 200 meters from the supposed “ISIS compound” where Mr. Ahmadi first stopped — the event that triggered the initial surveillance. Times journalists identified the car from which the rockets were launched as a white Toyota.

A year later, in August 2022, the Pentagon [announced a plan](#) for preventing civilian deaths in U.S. military operations that includes imposing a new system to reduce the risk of confirmation bias and misidentifying targets.

The Pentagon is still developing the policy, which incorporates training on mitigating cognitive bias and creates “civilian harm assessment cells.” It will also give the U.S. military [more ways to respond to victims](#), in addition to condolence payments to survivors and family members of those harmed.

None of Mr. Ahmadi’s surviving relatives have received monetary assistance from the U.S. government as a result of the strike.

One of Mr. Ahmadi’s brothers, Emal Ahmadi, whose toddler Malika was also killed in the strike, arrived in the United States last week.

“I thought the U.S. government would welcome us, meet with us,” he said. “We are waiting for them.”

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Click on link to download document: <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/kabul-strike-investigation-ar15-6/189578e886367589/full.pdf>

HEADLINE	01/05 FBI, DHS domestic terrorism report
SOURCE	https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-newsroom/nctc-transparency/item/2353-fbi-and-dhs-strategic-intelligence-assessment-and-data-on-domestic-terrorism
GIST	FBI and DHS - Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism Pursuant to Section 5602(a) and (b) of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2020, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), including the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and the Department of Justice (DOJ), jointly produced two reports on domestic terrorism, which provided data as of the end of FY 2019. Section 5602(d) requires the Director of the FBI and the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the DNI, to jointly submit to the appropriate Congressional committees annual updates to those reports. This report constitutes the annual updates for FY 2020 and FY 2021.

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HEADLINE	01/06 IS seeks Muslims in Singapore
SOURCE	https://borneobulletin.com.bn/islamic-state-called-on-muslims-in-singapore-to-join-terror-group/
GIST	<p>CNA – The Islamic State (IS) group in September 2022 called on Muslims in Singapore – along with those in other Asian states – to come forward to join the terror group, according to a report published by the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) on Tuesday.</p> <p>In an annual threat assessment as part of RSIS’ regularly published Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, the think-tank’s dean Kumar Ramakrishna said to “take heed” of an audiotape released last year by IS’s media affiliate Al-Furqan.</p> <p>In the 36-minute recording, IS spokesman Abu Umar al-Muhajir called on Muslims around the world to join the ranks of the militant group.</p> <p>He “especially” called on Muslims in East Asia – from the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and other countries – to join Islamic State since they were “especially oppressed and humiliated in this region”, according to a transcript by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center.</p> <p>Abu Umar also called on IS operatives in East Asia to fight against “communists” and “infidels” in their countries.</p> <p>RSIS’ 116-page report noted that Singapore’s Internal Security Department (ISD) had assessed that the threat from “extremism and terrorism” – both from organised groups based overseas and lone actors based locally – remained high in 2022. In a section focussed on Singapore, RSIS analysts Kalicharan Veera Singam and Abigail Leong described the Internet as continuing to play a “pivotal” role in sustaining the momentum of the global extremist movement.</p> <p>Developments in the region and further abroad may also reverberate closer to home, they said, citing how the Taleban’s return to power in Afghanistan has stirred lingering concerns of a resurgence in extremist activity in Southeast Asia.</p> <p>“This is especially given the historical nexus between the Taleban, Al-Qaeda and regional networks like JI (Jemaah Islamiyah),” they said. “More than a year on, however, there is limited evidence of collaboration between the abovementioned terrorist groups, or of Southeast Asian extremist performing (migration) to the Afghan theatre.”</p> <p>While the RSIS report said there were no specific or credible terrorist threats to Singapore currently, it warned that the country continues to feature in the propaganda of terror groups like IS, and remains a high-value target for both terrorist organisations and lone actors.</p> <p>The report’s authors added that issues around race and religion remain potential fault lines in Singapore, which could be manipulated by extremists.</p> <p>They pointed to the case of Australian national Andrew Gosling, who was sentenced to jail in April last year for throwing a bottle from his condominium toward a group of Malay Muslims gathered on the ground floor, and killing an elderly man in the process.</p> <p>Last month, a former polytechnic lecturer was also sentenced to jail for racist remarks against an interracial couple.</p> <p>“While these are isolated and one-off incidents that are not part of a wider domestic trend, they highlight the importance of maintaining tolerance and harmony in Singapore’s society, given a global climate currently challenged by extremism and violence,” said the RSIS analysts.</p>

HEADLINE	01/06 China's Afghanistan policy driven by fear?
SOURCE	https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/china/chinas-afghanistan-policy-driven-by-fear-of-taliban-claims-report-articleshow.html
GIST	<p>China's accommodative stance towards the Taliban is driven by a fear of the fundamentalist group, according to a recent report by the Afghan Diaspora Network which states Beijing's recent promises of investment and trade in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan are intended at preventing a possible spillover of militants into China's Xinjiang region.</p> <p>Afghanistan's turmoil-ridden past has seen the Taliban rule the country from 1996 to 2001 during which the extremist group had harboured various foreign terror elements including Uyghur militants. This connection between the Taliban with the Uyghurs has seemingly prompted the direction of China's diplomatic engagement in Afghanistan.</p> <p>China is among the few countries that kept their embassies operational even after the United States and NATO pulled out from Afghanistan and the Taliban toppled the government and took over in August 2021.</p> <p>Does China fear retaliation for the Uyghur genocide?</p> <p>A 2021 report says Uyghur militants of the Turkistan Islamic Party were involved in conflicts in both Syria and Afghanistan. The Turkistan Islamic Party is an alias for the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), an extremist Uyghur organisation which calls for the establishment of an Uyghur state in China's Xinjiang.</p> <p>China fears a possible influx of militants from Afghanistan under Taliban's rule. Chinese diplomats have reiterated to the Taliban regime since the latter's takeover of Afghanistan pressing for "resolute" measures against "all terrorist forces, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement" (ETIM).</p> <p>Unlike the US, which removed the ETIM from its list of terror organisations in 2020, China continues to designate it as one, the Afghan Diaspora Network report said.</p> <p>Further, the attack on Kabul's hotel on December 12, 2022, a site frequented by Chinese nationals, further raised Beijing's concerns and prompted the Chinese government's response in the form of an advisory to its citizens in Afghanistan, urging them "to leave and evacuate the country as soon as possible."</p> <p>Following the attack, China's foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Beijing was "deeply shocked" by the development and demanded the Taliban regime to search and rescue</p> <p>China's 'hollow promises'?</p> <p>In contrast to China's concerns regarding the possibility of a spillover of militancy from Afghanistan, the Taliban regime is "frustrated" by the hollow promises made by China in terms of economy and development. Despite being a signatory to a 2016 BRI agreement with the former Afghan administration, China has not come through with its promise of extending a fund of \$100 million in projects. So far, no BRI projects have been undertaken with China's help in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Meanwhile, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced in July 2022 that Beijing "hopes to push the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative with the development strategies of Afghanistan," in addition to supporting the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan "and share China's development opportunities," the report stated. However, despite China's talk of big investments, there has been no delivery on the ground, the Afghan Diaspora Network stated.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Targeting financial network linked to IS
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us-turkey-target-financial-network-linked-islamic-state-2023-01-05/

GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, Jan 5 (Reuters) - The U.S. Treasury Department said on Thursday it was taking joint action with Turkey against a network it said played a key role in money management, transfer and distribution for the Islamic State militant group operating in Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>Turkey's foreign affairs ministry said on Twitter the assets of seven individuals or legal persons involved in financing for the group were frozen.</p> <p>The U.S. Treasury Department said four individuals and two entities in Turkey were designated under U.S. sanctions.</p> <p>They included an Iraqi national living illegally in Turkey, Brukan al-Khatuni, his two sons and an associate, and two businesses they used to transfer money on behalf of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, between Turkey, Iraq and Syria, the Treasury Department said in a statement.</p> <p>The sanctions freeze any U.S. assets they hold and generally bar Americans from dealing with them.</p> <p>Islamic State killed and executed thousands of people in the name of its extreme interpretation of Islam before it was territorially defeated in Iraq in 2017 and Syria in 2019.</p> <p>The group last month named a new leader, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Quraishi, after its previous head blew himself up in October while being besieged by former anti-government rebels in southern Syria.</p> <p>The United States in November blacklisted four individuals and eight companies in South Africa aiding the group and in May imposed sanctions on a network of five Islamic State financial facilitators working across Indonesia, Syria and Turkey.</p> <p>The head of the network targeted on Thursday, Brukan al-Khatuni, helped with foreign financing for the group in Iraq before moving to Turkey in 2016, where he helped transfer funds from Gulf-based donors and handled millions of dollars for the group, according to the Treasury Department.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Pakistan kills militants near Afghan border
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-kills-11-militants-near-afghan-border-amid-spike-in-terrorism/6906107.html
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD — Pakistan said Thursday that a military counterterrorism raid in a remote region near Afghanistan's border had killed at least 11 militants linked to a banned militant organization.</p> <p>The "intelligence-based operation" in the South Waziristan district "successfully foiled a high-profile terrorist activity," a military statement said.</p> <p>Security sources said the slain men, including suicide bombers and a key commander, were members of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or the Pakistani Taliban, waging terrorism in Pakistan, mostly targeting security forces and civilians.</p> <p>The TTP has killed hundreds of people, including security forces, in the last year. More than 40 Pakistani security forces were killed in December alone, which turned out to be the deadliest month in a decade of terrorist violence in the country.</p> <p>The TTP, designated as a global terrorist organization by the United States, is a Pakistani offshoot and close ally of Afghanistan's ruling Islamist Taliban.</p> <p>Pakistan has maintained that fugitive TTP leaders and commanders are directing terrorist attacks from the Afghan side of the border, saying the Taliban rulers are not stopping them in line with their counterterrorism pledges.</p>

	<p>The rising violence in Pakistan has strained its otherwise better ties with the Taliban administration in Kabul.</p> <p>On Thursday, foreign ministry spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, while addressing a regular news conference, rejected speculation that her country was contemplating cross-border airstrikes against TTP Afghan hideouts.</p> <p>“I would like to say that Pakistan is a responsible member of the United Nations, and as a responsible member of the United Nations, it subscribes to and will always uphold the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter, which include territorial integrity and political independence of states,” Baloch said.</p> <p>She reiterated that Islamabad would continue to support Afghans “in their quest for a unified, independent and sovereign Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbors.”</p> <p>Early this week, the Taliban defense ministry warned Islamabad against indulging in any cross-border action, rejecting allegations that Kabul was allowing anyone to use Afghan soil against Pakistan or any other country.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Reward: \$10M for militant in Kenya attack
SOURCE	https://www.thedefensepost.com/2023/01/06/us-reward-al-shabaab-militant/
GIST	<p>The United States on Thursday offered a \$10 million reward to find a leader of Somalia’s Al-Shabaab militants over a 2020 attack on an air base in Kenya that killed three Americans.</p> <p>The State Department said it would offer the reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction in any country of Maalim Ayman, leader of the Al-Shabaab unit Jaysh Ayman.</p> <p>“Ayman was responsible for preparing the January 2020 attack,” a State Department statement said.</p> <p>Al-Shabaab, the Somali movement designated a terrorist group by Washington since 2008, claimed responsibility for the attack at the Manda Bay Airfield on Kenya’s northern coast.</p> <p>Authorities say the Jaysh Ayman unit carried out the pre-dawn raid, which killed two US military service members and a US defense contractor and destroyed several aircraft.</p> <p>The United States has worked closely both with Kenya and the fragile government in Mogadishu to counter Al-Shabaab, which has lost ground inside Somalia in recent months under pressure from an African Union force and US air strikes.</p> <p>A study last year by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism said that Jaysh Ayman was formed by Al-Shabaab in an effort to penetrate into Kenya.</p> <p>The unit, which has exercised growing autonomy, includes foreigners, dual nationals and Kenyans both of Somali and non-Somali descent, it said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 US faces limits of influence over Taliban
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/06/biden-taliban-womens-rights/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration is contemplating actions to punish the Taliban for its treatment of women and girls, potentially including cuts to American aid, even as officials acknowledge that the U.S. withdrawal has left them with little power to stop the group’s leaders from imposing their harsh vision on Afghan society.</p> <p>Officials are scrambling to respond to restrictive announcements from the Taliban-led government in Kabul, which last month prohibited women from attending university — meaning women cannot attend</p>

school after age 12 — and [from working for aid groups](#), a consequential move in a nation that remains highly dependent on outside assistance.

The decisions elicited international outcry, including among [some Muslim leaders](#), and prompted prominent aid groups to suspend their work in Afghanistan. The Taliban previously took steps to [exclude female students from secondary education](#), [require women to wear head-to-toe coverings](#) in public and impose other severe constraints on the lives of women and girls.

But U.S. officials are struggling to find ways to exert influence over the Taliban's top decision-makers more than a year after America's chaotic exit from Afghanistan, which triggered the collapse of the U.S.-backed government and handed the militant group a stunning victory following a two-decade war.

Officials and experts now expect the effort to help Afghan women and girls regain their rights will be a long-term endeavor, one that in the meantime may leave millions severely marginalized.

"The U.S. government's leverage is extremely limited," said Scott Worden, an Afghanistan expert at the U.S. Institute for Peace. "This needs to be approached both multilaterally and with a strategy looking at the Taliban's interests and what can impact them over time."

After its August 2021 departure, the United States has had scant sway in Kabul despite being the largest humanitarian donor to Afghanistan — humanitarian aid exceeded \$1 billion during that period — and the custodian of [frozen Afghan reserves](#), some of which have been placed in an internationally administered fund. Washington also wields influence over other countries' decisions about whether to eventually grant the Taliban government official recognition, something the group continues to crave.

But thus far, officials have been reluctant to alter or restrict U.S. assistance as part of their attempt to defend rights for women and other groups, arguing that such cuts could exacerbate the suffering of Afghans. And as recently as late December, a top American official said U.S. humanitarian aid [would remain unconditional](#).

That approach may be changing as Taliban leaders show willingness to flout global condemnation and make the delivery of needed medical, food and other assistance more difficult by excluding female aid workers. An administration official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to address internal deliberations, said that while U.S. options and leverage may be limited, there was consensus that the Taliban's actions were unacceptable.

"Among the many options that are on the table includes looking at the type and amount of aid being sent via international partners," the official said, declining to elaborate.

The United States could also voice support for the United Nations to maintain travel bans against Taliban leaders, or potentially impose new sanctions or other measures to restrict their finances and movements.

Deliberations over Afghanistan occur as the Biden administration touts its leadership of the coalition opposing Russia's war in Ukraine, what officials contend is proof of President Biden's foreign policy credentials. The broad international praise his position has garnered stands in contrast to the criticism he faced after the Afghanistan withdrawal, which plunged the country into economic crisis and left millions of Afghans, including many U.S. allies during the war, stranded in a country governed by a repressive enemy regime.

The Taliban has defied U.S. hopes in other ways, excluding broad sections of Afghan society from its government and harboring the leader of al-Qaeda in Kabul before he was [killed in an American drone strike](#) last summer. The group's record to date suggests that Western officials misjudged the influence of Taliban moderates who for years had promised foreign interlocutors that the organization had abandoned the practices seen as most problematic during its earlier rein in the 1990s.

The Biden administration has already taken some punitive steps in response, [temporarily halting engagement](#) with the group after its decision to bar girls from secondary school and imposing [visa restrictions](#) on Taliban figures believed to responsible for gender repression.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking after the Taliban's announcement on higher education, promised that the group would face "consequences" for its treatment of women and girls. "There are going to be costs if this is not reversed," he [said](#).

This week, State Department spokesman Ned Price said officials were discussing options.

The Taliban "cannot expect to take these draconian, barbaric steps that prevent opportunity for women and girls but more recently inflict such tremendous suffering on all of the people of Afghanistan and still expect to find a path to improved relations with the rest of the world," he [told reporters](#). "It is our goal with the response that we are developing internally and with our allies and partners to prove to them that will not be the case."

Halima Kazem, who is part of advocacy coalition Together Stronger, said some Afghan women she has spoken to are urging the United States to use reductions in assistance as pressure on the Taliban to change its policies. Many of them say they don't receive much of that aid in any case, Kazem said. Others disagree, she added.

In a [recent letter](#) to Blinken, Together Stronger urged the U.S. government to take several steps including limiting its engagement with the Taliban; establishing a liaison office to help coordinate aid and advocacy work within Afghanistan; and helping persecuted Afghans resettle in the United States.

For now, Kazem said, the best hope may be influencing Taliban moderates and hoping they eventually gain more sway within the organization relative to hard-liners such as [Haibatullah Akhonzada](#), the ultraconservative cleric who is the group's supreme leader.

In a [speech in November 2021](#), Akhonzada said God, rather than the Taliban, would provide food for the people of Afghanistan.

"There's a very ideological hard line that wants to make a modern caliphate, that wants at any costs to prove that that kind of society has a place in the modern world," Kazem said. "That group doesn't care about these pressures."

Even as the Biden administration seeks ways to help Afghan women in their worsening plight, senior officials are reinforcing their support for the president's decision to depart the country. National security adviser Jake Sullivan recently [described Biden's withdrawal decision](#) as an important part of the administration's approach to foreign affairs, suggesting it had allowed the United States to focus on the future rather than the legacy of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Now, the administration is hoping to strike a balance between preserving its role as a major provider of assistance and "also doing what we can to prevent the humanitarian situation from deteriorating further as a result of the difficult operating environment the Taliban have created," a State Department spokesperson said.

"These things take time," the official said. "They are serious."

James Dobbins, who served as a top U.S. diplomat for Afghanistan issues over several decades, noted that the U.S. government may not know enough about the Taliban's internal dynamics to effectively prejudice the effect of punitive actions and whether they might strengthen or weaken the hand of militant hard-liners.

Dobbins recommended continuing to talk with the group and looking for ways to influence it where possible. He described the current situation as a foreseeable outcome of the American exit, which exposed

	the weaknesses of the Afghan state and left millions at the mercy of a group that waged a 20-year insurgency to establish its extremist state.
	“It’s very disappointing,” he said. “But it was a predictable fact of leaving.”
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HEADLINE	01/05 Extremists plot ISIS resurgence
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/5/pentagon-warns-next-generation-extremist-fighters-/
GIST	<p>A long-feared Islamic State resurgence may arrive this year, military officials and national security insiders warn, as conditions are brewing across the Middle East and Africa for the group’s second coming as a major terrorist force and threat to global stability.</p> <p>It would be a remarkable resurgence for a terrorist group whose “caliphate” once controlled a broad swath of land in Iraq and Syria only to be routed by a U.S.-led counterterrorism campaign.</p> <p>Specialists say the Islamic State group, better known as ISIS, is almost surely plotting a deadly revenge campaign against the U.S. and its partners after numerous American strikes in Syria last year killed several of the group’s leaders and highest-ranking officials.</p> <p>ISIS may not be the powerhouse it was nearly a decade ago, but with thousands of fighters in its ranks, the group is still fully capable of carrying out deadly terrorist attacks. Some U.S. analysts warn of “strategic neglect” by the U.S. and its allies to the threat of an Islamic State resurgence.</p> <p>Over the past week, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack in the Egyptian city of Ismailia that killed four people and a bombing near the Afghan capital of Kabul that killed and wounded several people, local Afghan officials said. The Kabul bombing was the latest in a string of attacks by ISIS and its affiliates in Afghanistan since the Taliban retook control of the country.</p> <p>The highest-profile attack was the August 2021 suicide bombing at the Kabul airport that killed 13 U.S. Marines at the height of the Biden administration’s chaotic withdrawal from the country.</p> <p>That strike, and subsequent attacks across the Middle East and Africa, underscore the immediate dangers from ISIS, but Pentagon officials say the U.S. and its allies must contend with more serious, long-term problems.</p> <p>Since retaking territory in Iraq and Syrian from ISIS in the latter half of last decade, the U.S. and its regional partners — Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) — have captured tens of thousands of ISIS fighters. Those fighters are now in prison camps in both countries, with their long-term fates unclear and growing questions about security at the sites.</p> <p>Officials say deteriorating conditions at Syria’s al-Hol camp — home to thousands of Syrians displaced from their homes during the country’s decade-long civil war — have turned the facility into a potential breeding ground for terrorists.</p> <p>“There is a literal ‘ISIS army’ in detention in Iraq and Syria,” Gen. Michael “Erik” Kurilla, head of U.S. Central Command, said in a statement last week, part of a detailed CENTCOM report laying out ongoing American-led operations to defeat ISIS across Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>“There are, today, more than 10,000 ISIS leaders and fighters in detention facilities throughout Syria and more than 20,000 ISIS leaders and fighters in detention facilities in Iraq,” Gen. Kurilla said.</p> <p>“Finally, we have the potential next generation of ISIS,” he said. “These are the more than 25,000 children in the al-Hol camp who are in danger. These children in the camp are prime targets for ISIS radicalization. The international community must work together to remove these children from this environment by repatriating them to their countries or communities of origin while improving conditions in the camp.”</p>

The al-Hol camp and the ISIS detention sites in Iraq and Syria pose short- and long-term challenges for the U.S. and its allies. The most pressing concern is the threat of prison uprisings. In a January 2022 breakout at the Al-Hasakah facility in Syria, more than 400 ISIS fighters and more than 100 SDF members were killed.

Large-scale uprisings and prison breakouts across the region would immediately put thousands of trained ISIS fighters back onto the battlefield.

Never-ending fight

After an intense U.S.-led operation to crush the group, ISIS was declared “territorially defeated” by the Trump administration in 2019. The Pentagon conceded that the group still had fighters in its ranks and could carry out small-scale operations, but ISIS had lost virtually all of the territory it controlled across Iraq and Syria.

Although ISIS largely disappeared from the headlines, the U.S. war on the group has never stopped. In 2022 alone, the U.S. and its partners carried out more than 120 operations against ISIS in Syria, the Pentagon said. In Iraq, the number was 191.

Those missions resulted in the deaths of nearly 700 ISIS fighters and the detentions of another 374, according to CENTCOM figures. The operations included airstrikes and raids by ground forces. U.S. officials say such operations will continue.

Among the ISIS figures killed in 2022 were two of the group’s leaders. Last February, a daring raid by U.S. Special Forces in Syria killed Islamic State leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi. In October, his apparent replacement, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, was killed during a clash with Syrian rebel forces.

Those high-profile deaths set back ISIS’s reconstitution efforts, but analysts say the organization wants payback.

“As is typical, a worldwide ISIS revenge campaign is now all but inevitable, and the shape that takes will indicate where the jihadist group is most powerful,” Charles Lister, senior fellow and director of the Countering Terrorism & Extremism Program at the Middle East Institute, wrote in an analysis last month.

“Already, incoming pledges of allegiance from ISIS branches abroad have underlined the potency of the group’s presence in Africa, particularly in the Sahel,” he said.

ISIS’s presence across North Africa’s Sahel — including Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan — is perhaps the most obvious example of the group’s ability to reconstitute in the face of losses.

Still, ISIS’s influence extends beyond the Sahel.

Analysts warn that the Islamic State has gained a firm foothold in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado province, which could allow ISIS fighters to transport weapons, equipment and other goods by sea along the African coast. Some analysts say the U.S. military must take a more active role in the theater before the ISIS insurgency spreads like wildfire. African governments and security forces are ill-equipped to contain the group’s expansion.

“The Mozambican government has ... failed to fill the vacuum militarily or in terms of government services. To be a weak link, however, is better than to be no link at all,” Michael Rubin, a former Defense Department official and now a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote in a detailed analysis in September.

	<p>“If the United States and the international community do not implement a plan, financial or otherwise, to fill the vacuum, the Islamic State will rebound quickly,” he said in the analysis, originally posted by the military and security website 19FortyFive.</p> <p>“Time is running out, and strategic neglect seems to be the order of the day. Ultimately, the United States and other countries will need to confront the Islamic State’s resurgence,” Mr. Rubin said. “Proaction is cheaper and more effective than reaction. The question is whether the outside world can organize itself to make the right choice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Somalia: twin car explosions kill 20
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/05/world/africa/car-explosions-somalia-al-shabab.html
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya — More than 20 people were killed and 30 others wounded when twin car bombings hit a town in central Somalia, a Somali official said Thursday, the latest attack to illustrate how an Islamist terrorist group remains deadly even as it loses territory amid a large-scale government offensive.</p> <p>The two explosions hit a residential area of Mahas, a town in the Hiran region, on Wednesday. Mumin Mohamed Halane, the district commissioner of Mahas, told state radio that the first bomb was detonated in front of his house, and that the second one targeted the home of a lawmaker.</p> <p>Many nearby homes were damaged, leaving some potential survivors trapped.</p> <p>“Most of the dead are women and children,” Mr. Halane told Radio Mogadishu.</p> <p>Al Shabab, an extremist group that swears allegiance to Al Qaeda, were quick to claim responsibility for the blasts, asserting that they had killed 87 people, including military officials and soldiers.</p> <p>The authorities did not release an official figure of casualties, but a senior Somali government official said that more than 20 people had been killed and 30 others injured. Media reports put the death toll at as high as 35, with 40 wounded. More than two dozen of the injured were airlifted for treatment in the capital, Mogadishu, said the Somali official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter with the news media and so spoke on the condition of anonymity.</p> <p>The attack comes months into a large-scale government campaign aimed at battling the terrorist group, which has wreaked havoc across Somalia and the larger Horn of Africa area for more than a decade and a half.</p> <p>After he was elected president in May, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud declared an all-out war on Al Shabab, vowing to limit their geographical reach and cut off their money. The group, which is thought to command about 7,000 to 12,000 fighters, extorts businesses and collects millions of dollars in revenue every year.</p> <p>In the latest offensive, the government has received backing from several local clan militias in addition to African Union peacekeeping forces. It has also received assistance from the United States, which has used drone strikes to target Shabab fighters.</p> <p>But the authorities have also issued a directive limiting local news media reporting on Al Shabab’s activities, a move that rights groups and press freedom organizations have said threatens free speech.</p> <p>Officials say the military campaign has been increasingly successful, with government forces killing hundreds of militants and seizing dozens of towns and villages, mostly in south and central Somalia. In recent weeks, state media have televised a public parade of young men who the authorities say defected from the group.</p> <p>The Shabab have responded with ferocity, carrying out ever-deadlier attacks across the country.</p>

	<p>Last August, it conducted one of its longest and most sustained attacks, a 30-hour siege at a hotel in the capital that killed 21 people and wounded 117 others.</p> <p>In October, it claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in the central town of Beledweyne that killed at least 20 people and wounded dozens of others, and later that month, it carried out the deadliest terrorist attack in Somalia in five years, killing 121 people and wounding nearly 300 others in a twin-car explosion that struck the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>In a drought-ravaged nation where millions face hunger and starvation, officials say the group has also burned trucks carrying food supplies, destroyed wells and damaged electricity and telecommunication equipment.</p> <p>After the attack on Wednesday, Somali officials remained defiant about their efforts to defeat the group. President Hassan and Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre both held separate discussions with Western and African diplomats, along with Somali security officials, to discuss how to collaborate on the fight against Al Shabab.</p> <p>Ali Gudlawe Hussein, the regional president of Hirshabelle State, where the town of Mahas is, called on people to unite against the group.</p> <p>“We will never give up on eradicating them,” Mr. Hussein told state radio.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/05 SPD arrests prolific shoplifters: but a bust?
SOURCE	https://publicola.com/2023/01/05/arrests-of-prolific-shoplifters-netted-first-time-offenders-people-previously-deemed-incompetent/
GIST	<p>Capping off a year of renewed focus on low-level street crime such as shoplifting, the Seattle Police Department announced just before the new year that it had arrested 11 “prolific shoplifters” in an operation targeting downtown retail theft, booking eight of them into the downtown jail.</p> <p>In a post on the department’s blog, SPD described a carefully orchestrated operation in which officers worked with security staff at three stores to identify prolific thieves and apprehend them after they “gather[ed] items like clothing, makeup, food, and liquor, and then walk[ed] out of the store with no attempt to pay.”</p> <p>SPD declined to provide police reports for the arrests, and information about the eight bookings hasn’t shown up yet in the Seattle Municipal Court’s public portal. However, the department did post images of the recovered goods, which included beer, ice cream, sandwiches, lip gloss, and toilet paper. With the exception of a case of beer and what looks like two sample bottles of cologne, none of the items appear to be worth more than several dollars.</p> <p><i>Of the three people with multiple prior arrests or charges, two were deemed incompetent to stand trial in the past because of mental illness, including one whose history of paranoid, delusional outbursts, attributed to schizophrenia in court documents, is described at length in police reports.</i></p> <p>Indeed, while the SPD post makes it sound like police targeted some of the city’s worst offenders, our review of the court history of the eight booked offenders shows that most of them have scant criminal records or well-documented histories of mental illness and addiction—conditions that aren’t addressed by sending people to jail for a night or taking them to trial. At least two people on the list have been declared incompetent to stand trial because of mental illness in the past. None appear to be on the city’s “prolific offenders” list.</p>

SPD released three of the suspects without booking them, and booked the remaining eight into jail; the department provided the names of those eight to PubliCola in response to a request.

Of the eight, one—as SPD noted in its post—had several outstanding warrants and faced additional charges, including possession of auto theft tools.

Among the remaining seven, only three have been charged with, or arrested for, more than one misdemeanor in Seattle in the past, according to court records—an extremely minimal definition of “prolific.” The remaining four had either zero or just one prior case in Seattle Municipal Court records, which go back decades.

Of the three people with multiple prior arrests or charges, two were deemed incompetent to stand trial in the past because of mental illness, including one whose history of paranoid, delusional outbursts, attributed to schizophrenia in court documents, is described at length in police reports.

Almost every person who was booked into jail as part of this highly publicized operation was released within a day, and City Attorney Ann Davison’s office declined to file charges in seven of the 11 cases.

In other words: The great holiday Retail Theft Operation of 2022 was a bit of a bust.

Because SPD, and Mayor Bruce Harrell, have placed such an emphasis on the need to prosecute people who engage in frequent shoplifting from downtown stores (a practice that, [as we’ve documented](#), can be prosecuted as “organized retail theft” even if the person is stealing something for their personal use), it’s worth taking a closer look at the cases in which the city previously arrested or charged the people picked up last month for other misdemeanors.

The only clear-cut case of a “prolific offender,” the Northgate Target shoplifter, was arrested repeatedly for stealing clothes, including 10 incidents in 2020. In the December bust, SPD picked him up for taking \$51 worth of items from a downtown Bartell drug store, including pens, two sodas, and a notebook.

According to court records, the man had been referred to community court for several of his previous cases, but didn’t follow through; in a mental health evaluation in 2020, he acknowledged a history of drug abuse and claimed he was having auditory hallucinations, but was found competent to stand trial.

The other two cases involve people whose mental health issues and struggles with addiction were well documented. In one, the court referred an alleged serial shoplifter to mental health court; the man, who is homeless and reported daily drug use and heavy drinking, was recently found incompetent to stand trial in several cases and referred for a mental health evaluation. All but one of those cases involved shoplifting from downtown stores; the other was an alleged assault at the downtown library in 2016.

A spokeswoman for SPD noted that officers don’t always arrest people identified as shoplifters by store security guards. It’s also true that security guards don’t always call police when they witness or confront someone shoplifting, so the number of arrests doesn’t represent the actual number of shoplifting incidents.

The second involves a man court records describe as schizophrenic. The man had been arrested, most recently, in August, after neighbors called the police when he was “standing in the street and screaming” in a “possible mental crisis,” according to police reports. Officers who responded to that call arrested the man for subsequently walking out of a nearby drug store with three board games. His criminal history included many arrests for harassing and attacking members of his family, who lived nearby, when he was “off his medication” and using drugs.

Asked to comment on the downtown arrests and the details of specific suspects’ legal histories, a spokeswoman for SPD noted that SPD doesn’t always arrest people identified as shoplifters by store security guards, so some of the people could be repeat offenders without being arrested. Additionally, security guards don’t always call police when they witness or confront someone shoplifting.

	<p>“The Retail Theft Operation was conducted to assist in identifying prolific offenders, but also deter shoplifting in the stores overall,” the SPD spokeswoman said. “Detectives, Officers and Loss Prevention teams often contact suspects, who have shoplifted liquor or other items multiple times, but may not arrest these suspects for various reasons. Most often the contact is reported as a terry stop, shoplift or trespass by officers.”</p> <p>The City Attorney’s Office did not respond to requests for comment about their charging decisions.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Climate change jokes funny – and accurate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/01/05/comedy-climate-change-jokes/
GIST	<p>Comedy is a lot like dumpster diving. You look at things in a different light than most people.</p> <p>Stand-up comedians have long cast an amusing lens on our society, crafting observations about everything we might encounter, such as family, divorce, travel, a second divorce, pets and, more recently, climate change.</p> <p>Comedy may not seem like a good vehicle to showcase grim news of our planet, but just because something is entertaining doesn’t mean it can’t be useful, too. Humor can provide many benefits in tackling serious subjects. Limited research shows that climate change memes can boost a person’s civic engagement. Good-natured comedy can also help process negative emotions about global warming and sustain hope. (A note: When I’m not writing about science, I’m also a stand-up comedian).</p> <p>But the human-exacerbated deterioration of Earth is not easy to make funny, especially as some climate goals are seemingly impossible now. Additionally, poorly executed climate jokes can dissuade people from engaging in the topic.</p> <p>With professionals increasingly discussing environmental themes, we looked at a few recent (and funny) bits from stand-up comedians in the United States. (Sorry, no George Carlin bit included this time around.) Most clips are from Netflix, with some from independently produced comedy, as we wanted to focus on jokes with the potential to reach wide and diverse audiences. (Please comment or send us a note if you want to share other bits you may want explained.)</p> <p>Enjoy these punchlines on global temperature increases, personal climate responsibility, overpopulation and flooding.</p> <p>Michelle Wolfe: “I raised the temperature a little.” <i>Climate change is a real big deal, and everyone says Mother Nature. And I do believe nature is a woman because she’s trying to kill us in the most passive aggressive way possible. It’s not some sort of immediate fire or flood or cool explosion. She’s just like, ‘What? I raised the temperature a little. Oh, are you uncomfortable? Maybe I wouldn’t have if you’d taken out the recycling like I asked. I’m fine.’</i> — Michelle Wolf, “Joke Show” (2019)</p> <p>Unlike an end-of-the-world Nostradamus scenario, a warmer Earth operates differently. A 2-degree Fahrenheit increase over the past 150 years may sound inconsequential, but research shows the incremental heating we’re experiencing is pushing climate and weather events to more extremes.</p> <p>Worldwide, communities are experiencing hotter heat waves, drier droughts, heavier downpours and more rapidly intensifying storms. Each event is inflicting more damage on society, partly because of growing urban development and populations.</p> <p>Many may point out that we have seen intense weather events throughout history, but now these extreme events are happening at a higher frequency because the excess warming from humans is affecting weather-system dynamics. As an extreme-weather reporter, I have probably used the word “unprecedented” an unprecedented number of times to describe natural disasters in recent years.</p>

Alas, the explanation can get technical for a stand-up special, so I'll take Wolf's playful comparison on the subtlety of climate change.

Nate Bargatze: "Any chance this fight is about global warming?"

"I looked up a list of what you're supposed to do for global warming as an individual... 'Just talk to your friends and family about it.' ... Think about how far out it goes ... I had a great-aunt and uncle fistfight each other at a wedding. Let me get in the middle of that fight. 'Any chance this fight is about global warming? Because I would just love to get that conversation rolling.'"

— Nate Bargatze, "The Tennessee Kid" (2019)

On stage, Nate Bargatze feigns naivete, but I think he probably has one of the most relatable global warming bits in a mainstream comedy special. At the top, he says he's "not a smart person," which may help disarm his audience when he discusses global warming for a very funny six minutes.

[Scientists say](#) people need to talk about climate change more, but Bargatze describes how hard that task is. He's not wrong.

Many people don't talk about global warming even though they're concerned. The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication [found that](#) 67 percent of Americans said they "rarely" or "never" discussed climate change with friends and family, even though 64 percent said they are "very" or "somewhat" worried.

But how do you broach Earth's demise to family and friends when we're the problem? As my Washington Post colleague [Allyson Chiu reported](#), experts suggest avoiding an attitude that is too fearful ("It's too late to do anything!") or too optimistic ("We can make it out!") because either can lead to inaction. The reality is that we are baked into certain consequences on Earth, but we can still prevent further warming and adapt.

Even though Bargatze takes an attitude that pokes fun at talking about climate change with family and friends, he is doing his part by discussing it on his special with an everyman perspective. Pretty meta.

Joel Kim Booster: "Don't come here. Somebody has put on a podcast."

During his special "Psychosexual" (2022) on Netflix, Joel Kim Booster asks a couple in the crowd if they plan to have kids, appearing to shift into relationship jokes. They say yes, and he quickly replies, "So you don't believe in climate change? Wow, what an interesting way to learn that."

What a left turn. The audience roars. He continues.

"I don't believe that overpopulation is the major issue at play here. I do think if you want to have kids, you should have kids. I do think that if you are having kids, knowing everything we know about the way the world is going, it is sort of like when you're at a party that you know is dying down. ... You get a text from a friend and they're like, 'Hey, should I still come to the party?' 'Yeah. Yeah. Jump in that Uber, girl. I'm sure it'll be fine. I'm sure there will be ice still at the party by the time you get here.' When what you should be doing is calling them immediately, being like, 'Don't come here. Somebody has put on a podcast. Party is over.'"

— Joel Kim Booster, "Psychosexual" (2022)

Booster and the audience initially share a laugh as he addresses a concern some prospective parents have about the consequences of having children as the climate changes. Researchers, previously attempting to find the carbon footprint of such a decision, calculated that having one less child would reduce a person's footprint (assuming their children will have children, etc.) at greater extents than living without a car or skipping one transatlantic flight.

But the reality is more complicated, [reports my Post colleague Shannon Osaka](#). If the United States meets its goal to cut its emissions by half by 2030 and to zero by 2050, a child born today would have less of an environmental impact per year over their lifetime.

“Under that scenario, having one fewer child starts to look on a par with living car-free or skipping a transatlantic flight — significant, but not even the most important individual action one can take,” Shannon writes.

I don’t know if Booster knew the carbon footprint of having a child when writing this joke. (Disclaimer: I opened for him on his tour about a year before his special and don’t remember talking specifically about climate change or hearing this joke.) But he fast-forwards past the issue of overpopulation (unlike [Bill Burr](#), who has mentioned it in his past *three* specials) to get at the heart of the issue with an apt analogy: Should I have a child in a climate-change-ravaged world?

The answer: The decision is up to us, as we work to ensure our world is a livable place for our kids and grandkids, preferably without parties that play podcasts.

Kristen Sivills: “I don’t even have car insurance.”

“I’m from Virginia Beach, so if you don’t know, if somebody spits outside, it floods outside to the point that you all live here now, so get to know your neighbors right now. These are now your roommates. *Climate change is crazy. ... They got me scared about property at this point. I don’t want to pay for flood insurance. I don’t even have car insurance, okay?*”
— Kristen Sivills, “Ain’t Your Mama’s Heat Wave” (2021)

Kristen Sivills brings up an ever-growing effect of climate change: property loss.

The number of expensive flooding disasters has grown in recent decades. Part of the issue is stronger storms and heavier downpours brought on by climate change. Another challenge is people moving into areas with higher climate risks — and they may not [even know it](#).

One [flood model](#) estimated that in 2020 more than 6 million homes in the United States are in areas at substantial risk of flooding in any given year. That was about [70 percent more](#) properties than designated within FEMA’s Special Flood Hazard Areas, which determines eligibility for the National Flood Insurance Program, [my colleagues have reported](#). By 2050, the number of properties at substantial flooding risk could rise to 16 million.

Like Sivills jokes, flood insurance premiums are another cost that can be challenging to add to everyday expenses. Last year, hundreds of thousands of Americans [dropped their insurance](#) through FEMA’s National Flood Insurance Program after the agency restructured the system to more accurately show the flood risk of a property.

Unlike other clips featured in this article that aired on Netflix, Sivills wrote and performed this bit as part of an independently produced comedy special called “Ain’t Your Mama’s Heat Wave” by the nonprofit Hip Hop Caucus. It was recorded in St. Paul’s district in Norfolk, a Black public housing community undergoing redevelopment because of “climate flooding, sea level rise, and a legacy of racist urban policies,” [according to the project’s website](#). In recent years, many projects and nonprofit groups have partnered with comedians to find new ways to communicate the climate change threats and solutions.

“It was difficult to make climate change funny,” Sivills wrote to The Post. “It’s not what I typically talk about in my stand up, especially when it’s discussing how it’s affected MY community personally ... but comedians have always been vessels for change. Why not make use of the platform, and humanize big issues like this?”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Warm weather upends winter around world
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/01/05/warm-winter-effects-europe-us/

Across much of the Northern Hemisphere, this winter is a lot warmer than usual.

Europe is experiencing [a record-shattering warm spell](#), with meteorologists calling the current heat wave “totally insane” and “the most extreme event ever seen in European climatology.” On New Year’s Day, at least seven nations experienced their warmest January weather on record, with some cities in Spain and France sweating as temperatures rose to over 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

And despite a bone-chilling storm that passed over much of the United States around Christmas, temperatures remain higher than average in much of the South and New England. In New York City, visitors to Central Park got a taste of shorts weather as temperatures hit 66 degrees Wednesday.

As the globe warms, winters around the world are changing. Since 1970, winter in the United States has [warmed faster](#) than any other season, leading to early blooms, shortened winter sports seasons and disrupted hibernations for wildlife.

The effects of this warm winter — some good, others bad — are already rippling around the world.

An energy crisis averted in Europe

It was supposed to be a dark winter on the European continent.

After launching its invasion of Ukraine, Russia [restricted](#) the flow of natural gas to Western European countries that are supporting the Ukrainian government. Europe had braced for [an energy “nightmare”](#) in which energy-intensive manufacturing could slow and home heating costs spike.

But Mother Nature had a different plan. Forecasts for abnormally warm weather dampened demand, and European natural gas futures [fell to their lowest level](#) since the beginning of the war.

“We are quite lucky with the weather,” said Georg Zachmann, a senior fellow at the Brussels-based think tank Bruegel. Europe also sought new energy supplies, such as U.S. liquefied natural gas, to reduce Russian leverage.

Russia, he added, “certainly had hoped to put Europe on the brink of either some countries begging for gas, and therefore destroying the unity in Europe, or really creating massive turmoil.”

“That did not play out.”

A shortened season in ski country

Elsewhere in Europe, the warm weather is bad news. As glaciers recede and snow becomes scarcer, climate change threatens to [hit the skiing industry hard](#). Across the Alps, springlike weather is [forcing some snowless ski resorts](#) to close early this year.

In Switzerland, temperatures are so high that the organizers of the annual ski World Cup this month are turning to artificial snow, [according to the BBC](#). As the Swiss weather service MeteoSuisse [joked](#) on [its blog](#), “This turn of the new year could almost make you forget that it’s the height of winter.”

Some ski resorts in the United States are hurting, too. Although over two feet of snow in mid-December provided plenty of powder for customers at the Wild Wings Ski Touring Center in Southern Vermont to trek on cross-country skis or snowshoes, by New Year’s Day, a bout of “rainy, yucky weather” had ruined business, said co-owner Tracy Black.

“We need it to be cold, and we need it to snow,” she added.

It’s a change that’s impossible to ignore for skiing proprietors such as Black, who has lived in Vermont for four decades.

	<p>“There have been some highs. There have been some lows,” she said. “But that average is what’s creeping up.”</p> <p>Misshapen peaches in Georgia</p> <p>A warm winter can also wreak havoc on farms, allowing parasites to persist and trees to bud prematurely.</p> <p>In Georgia, the concern this winter for growers is peaches. Without enough cold, the state’s iconic fruit cannot thrive. Peach trees need a certain number of “chill hours” — the amount depends on the variety — to form flower buds and produce plump fruit later in the year, according to Jeff Cook, a peach agent at the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.</p> <p>“We’re always worried about cold,” he said. “But really, you can’t worry too much. We can’t do much about it.”</p> <p>Come spring, peaches grown after too balmy of a winter tend to be smaller and misshapen, making them harder to sell. And they often ripen erratically, requiring more time to pick. Over the past two decades, peach growers have seen winter temperatures climb, Cook said.</p> <p>Ultimately, though, the fruit is still good eating, Cook said. “They taste just as good as the rest,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Wild weather driven by Pacific, warmth
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/wild-weather-driven-by-roiling-pacific-nature-and-warming/
GIST	<p>In a world getting used to extreme weather, 2023 is starting out more bonkers than ever and meteorologists are saying it’s natural weather weirdness with a bit of help from human-caused climate change.</p> <p>Much of what’s causing problems worldwide is coming out of a roiling Pacific Ocean, transported by a wavy jet stream, experts said.</p> <p>At least one highway in drought-mired California looked more like a river because of torrential rain from what is technically called an atmospheric river of moisture. New Year’s brought shirtsleeve weather to the U.S. East and record high temperatures to Europe as the Northern Hemisphere on Wednesday was more than 2.6 degrees (1.4 degrees Celsius) hotter than the late 20th century average. And this is after frigid air escaped the Arctic to create a Christmas mess for much of the United States.</p> <p>“All the ingredients are in place for two weeks of wild weather especially in the Western U.S.,” private meteorologist Ryan Maue said in an email.</p> <p>Maue said the big driver is a three-year La Nina — natural temporary cooling of the equatorial Pacific Ocean that alters world weather patterns — that just won’t quit. It is creating literal waves in the weather systems that ripple across the globe. And on certain parts of the waves are storms where the atmospheric pressure drops low and quickly, called bomb cyclones, that are quite wet, and they travel on atmospheric waves that transport the weather called the jet stream.</p> <p>The jet stream now is unusually wavy, said Maue and Woodwell Climate Research Center climate scientist Jennifer Francis. The storms dip over the warm subtropics “and create a conveyor belt of moisture to strafe the West Coast of the U.S.,” Maue said.</p> <p>“I’d describe the jet stream and bomb cyclones as a runaway Pacific freight train loaded with moisture,” said Maue, former chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the Trump administration. “Climate change adds more fuel to the locomotive engine.”</p>

More than 5 inches of rain fell on Saturday in the Sacramento area and California braced for bigger storms Wednesday and Thursday. As of Wednesday, snowpack was third highest in 40 years, more than 170% of normal.

In addition to La Nina, a different natural temporary weather event called the Madden-Julian Oscillation enhances storms in the western Pacific, Maue said.

Francis points to a “blob” of warm sea water off the Aleutian Islands, a phenomena that is happening more often, and a “crazy warm” Arctic — Wednesday it was 5.8 degrees (3.2 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 1979-2000 average — as part of what’s juicing up the Pacific.

And with a wavier than normal jet stream, extremes of all kinds go up and down and around the planet, Francis said.

“You can think of it like a jump rope. When you start to flick it at one end, that ripple goes through the whole jump rope eventually,” Francis said Wednesday. “And so it could be that the waving as such, being perhaps driven in the Pacific, could be accentuating it also over Europe.”

A weather station in Delemont, Switzerland, on the French border, smashed its January record with an average daily temperature of 18.1 degrees Celsius (nearly 65 Fahrenheit) on the first day of the year. In Bucharest, Romania, on Tuesday it broke a January record at 17.2 degrees Celsius (63 degrees Fahrenheit) and it was 17.9 degrees Celsius (64.2 Fahrenheit) in the Russian Republic of Dagestan, according to extreme weather tracker Maximiliano Herrera.

Swiss weather service MeteoSuisse quipped on its blog: “... this turn of the new year could almost make you forget that it’s the height of winter.”

This extreme weather has “a silver lining,” especially with the record heat in Europe in January easing winter heating fuel crunches caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, said Colorado meteorologist Bob Henson of Yale Climate Connections. And California, where there’s been a more than 20-year megadrought that worsens wildfires, is getting much-needed rain and snow — too much of it, actually.

Roads and levees in California were washed out early in the week. Schools were closed Wednesday in the San Francisco area as more than 8,000 sandbags were given out in anticipation of extensive flooding. Flights were cancelled.

“Excessive rainfall over already saturated soils will result in rapid rises on creeks, streams and rivers as well as flooding in urban areas,” forecasters said in a report.

Except for the impressive record heat in Europe, “which is yet another example of the manifestation of human-induced climate change,” Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini said he finds nothing too unusual.

Weather is naturally extreme “so the recent events we’ve been seeing can occur naturally,” said Weather Underground co-founder Jeff Masters now at Yale Climate Connections. “But with the disruption to global weather patterns that climate change is bringing the probability of seeing unusual weather events in any season increases.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Study: 2/3 rd of glaciers to disappear by 2100
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/study-two-thirds-of-glaciers-on-track-to-disappear-by-2100/
GIST	The world’s glaciers are shrinking and disappearing faster than scientists thought, with two-thirds of them projected to melt out of existence by the end of the century at current climate change trends, according to a new study.

But if the world can limit future warming to just a few more tenths of a degree and fulfill international goals — technically possible but unlikely according to many scientists — then slightly less than half the globe's glaciers will disappear, said the same study. Mostly small but well-known glaciers are marching to extinction, study authors said.

In an also unlikely worst-case scenario of several degrees of warming, 83% of the world's glaciers would likely disappear by the year 2100, study authors said.

The study in Thursday's journal *Science* examined all of the globe's 215,000 land-based glaciers — not counting those on ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica — in a more comprehensive way than past studies. Scientists then used computer simulations to calculate, using different levels of warming, how many glaciers would disappear, how many trillions of tons of ice would melt, and how much it would contribute to sea level rise.

The world is now on track for a 2.7-degree Celsius (4.9 degrees Fahrenheit) temperature rise since pre-industrial times, which by the year 2100 means losing 32% of the world's glacier mass, or 48.5 trillion metric tons of ice as well as 68% of the glaciers disappearing. That would increase sea level rise by 4.5 inches (115 millimeters) in addition to seas already getting larger from melting ice sheets and warmer water, said study lead author David Rounce.

"No matter what, we're going to lose a lot of the glaciers," Rounce, a glaciologist and engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University, said. "But we have the ability to make a difference by limiting how many glaciers we lose."

"For many small glaciers it is too late," said study co-author Regine Hock, a glaciologist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the University of Oslo in Norway. "However, globally our results clearly show that every degree of global temperature matters to keep as much ice as possible locked up in the glaciers."

Projected ice loss by 2100 ranges from 38.7 trillion metric tons to 64.4 trillion tons, depending on how much the globe warms and how much coal, oil and gas is burned, according to the study.

The study calculates that all that melting ice will add anywhere from 3.5 inches (90 millimeters) in the best case to 6.5 inches (166 millimeters) in the worst case to the world's sea level, 4% to 14% more than previous projections.

That 4.5 inches of sea level rise from glaciers would mean more than 10 million people around the world — and more than 100,000 people in the United States — would be living below the high tide line, who otherwise would be above it, said sea level rise researcher Ben Strauss, CEO of Climate Central. Twentieth-century sea level rise from climate change added about 4 inches to the surge from 2012 Superstorm Sandy costing about \$8 billion in damage just in itself, he said.

Scientists say future sea level rise will be driven more by melting ice sheets than glaciers.

But the loss of glaciers is about more than rising seas. It means shrinking water supplies for a big chunk of the world's population, more risk from flood events from melting glaciers and about losing historic ice-covered spots from Alaska to the Alps to even near Mount Everest's base camp, several scientists told *The Associated Press*.

"For places like the Alps or Iceland... glaciers are part of what makes these landscapes so special," said National Snow and Ice Data Center Director Mark Serreze, who wasn't part of the study but praised it. "As they lose their ice in a sense they also lose their soul."

Hock pointed to Vernagtferner glacier in the Austrian Alps, which is one of the best-studied glaciers in the world, but said "the glacier will be gone."

The Columbia Glacier in Alaska had 216 billion tons of ice in 2015, but with just a few more tenths of a degree of warming, Rounce calculated it will be half that size. If there's 4 degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since pre-industrial times, an unlikely worst-case scenario, it will lose two-thirds of its mass, he said.

"It's definitely a hard one to look at and not drop your jaw at," Rounce said.

Glaciers are crucial to people's lives in much of the world, said National Snow and Ice Center Deputy Lead Scientist Twila Moon, who wasn't part of the study.

"Glaciers provide drinking water, agricultural water, hydropower, and other services that support billions (yes, billions!) of people," Moon said in an email.

Moon said the study "represents significant advances in projecting how the world's glaciers may change over the next 80 years due to human-created climate change."

That's because the study includes factors in glacier changes that previous studies didn't and is more detailed, said Ruth Mottram and Martin Stendel, climate scientists at the Danish Meteorological Institute who weren't part of the research.

This new study better factors in how the glaciers' ice melts not just from warmer air, but water both below and at the edges of glaciers and how debris can slow melt, Stendel and Mottram said. Previous studies concentrated on large glaciers and made regional estimates instead of calculations for each individual glacier.

In most cases, the estimated loss figures Rounce's team came up with are slightly more dire than earlier estimates.

If the world can somehow limit warming to the global goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since pre-industrial times — the world is already at 1.1 degrees (2 degrees Fahrenheit) — Earth will likely lose 26% of total glacial mass by the end of the century, which is 38.7 trillion metric tons of ice melting. Previous best estimates had that level of warming melting translating to only 18% of total mass loss.

"I have worked on glaciers in the Alps and Norway which are really rapidly disappearing," Mottram said in an email. "It's kind of devastating to see."

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/05 Most wanted human trafficker arrested
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-united-arab-emirates-law-enforcement-libya-government-a6464afdb06d0e52602062b5b276bc17
GIST	<p>CAIRO (AP) — An Eritrean national described as one of "the world's most wanted" human traffickers has been arrested in Sudan after an international manhunt led by the United Arab Emirates, Interpol announced on Thursday.</p> <p>The suspect — identified as Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam — is accused of leading a criminal organization that abducts, extorts and murders East African migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya, the France-based police agency said in an online statement.</p>

He was arrested on Sunday in a "major international police operation led by the United Arab Emirates, based on information shared via Interpol," said a statement from the UAE's Ministry of Interior, published by The Khaleej Times.

A breakthrough in the manhunt came after UAE authorities began closely tracking Habtemariam's organization and members of his family, uncovering money laundering patterns that led them to Sudan, the agency said. Interpol first began monitoring Habtemariam's activities in 2019.

Habtemariam had been the subject of two Interpol red notices, one from Ethiopia and the other from the Netherlands, the agency said. Dutch authorities accused Habtemariam of running a camp in Libya that housed thousands of migrants.

Habtemariam was convicted in absentia and sentenced to life imprisonment after escaping from custody in Ethiopia while on trial on people smuggling charges in 2020.

Libya has in recent years emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants seeking a better quality of life in Europe. The oil-rich country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. Human traffickers have benefited from the chaos in Libya, smuggling migrants in across the country's lengthy land borders with six nations.

According to a tweet posted by the UAE's interior minister, Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the international operation lasted nine months and also involved Dutch, Ethiopian and Sudanese authorities, Interpol said.

"Thanks to the professionalism and dedication of our police officers, the world's most wanted human trafficker will no longer be able to commit his despicable actions," Saeed Abdullah al-Suwaidi, director of the UAE's Federal Anti-Narcotics General Directorate, said in a separate statement cited by Interpol.

Sudanese police did not respond to requests for comment.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Cartel's violent response to capture
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/05/mexican-authorities-recapture-drug-lord-el-chapo-son
GIST	<p>Mexican authorities have captured Ovidio Guzmán, a son of incarcerated drugs kingpin Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, prompting a wave of retaliatory attacks from cartel gunmen in the northern city of Culiacán.</p> <p>After a night of violence, gunmen exchanged fire with security forces, blocking roads with burning vehicles and shooting at army helicopters and police aeroplanes bringing reinforcements to the city.</p> <p>According to one resident, heavy fighting raged for hours after Guzmán – a key figure in the Sinaloa cartel since the arrest of his father – was arrested in the city early on Thursday.</p> <p>"They caught him at about 4am, and since then the shooting hasn't stopped. It's been a real mess – they're shooting up in the air trying to bring down the [police] helicopters. The whole town is a mess," the resident said.</p> <p>Cartel members also reportedly seized a Red Cross ambulance, took medical personnel from hospitals to attend their wounded comrades, threatened reporters and seized press vehicles.</p> <p>All major roads into the city were blocked with burning vehicles, and gunmen attacked a military air base and Culiacán international airport, where a passenger jet was hit by a bullet as it was preparing to take off, according to the airline Aeromexico.</p> <p>The Sinaloa state government said three members of the security forces had been killed in the clashes.</p>

“We continue to work on controlling the situation,” said Cristobal Castaneda, Sinaloa’s public security chief.

The defense secretary, Luís Cresencio Sandoval, told reporters that Guzmán had been transferred to the Mexican capital after his capture by members of the army and national guard. He described the arrest as a “decisive blow against the Pacific cartel”, using another name for the powerful crime faction.

The exact circumstances of the arrest were unclear: Sandoval said it followed six months of surveillance, but also appeared to suggest there was an element of chance involved. “When the armed forces set up a roadblock to stop several vehicles with improvised armour, [cartel] gunmen opened fire. Security forces recognized Ovidio Guzmán, who they managed to detain,” he said.

Guzmán, 32, was previously detained briefly in Culiacán in 2019, but quickly released after a violent response from the gang in an episode which became a major embarrassment for the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

His recapture comes just days before a North American leaders’ summit in Mexico City next week, which Joe Biden will attend and at which security issues are on the agenda.

The United States had offered a \$5m reward for information leading to the arrest or conviction of Guzmán.

A surge in overdose deaths in the United States, fueled by the synthetic opioid fentanyl, has led to increased pressure on Mexico to combat the organizations – such as the Sinaloa cartel – responsible for producing and shipping the drug.

For Tomás Guevara, a security expert at the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, Guzmán’s arrest helps save face for Mexican law enforcement following the humiliation of having to let El Chapo’s son go in 2019.

“The detention of Ovidio is finally the culmination of something that was planned three years ago,” he said.

It might also herald a change in approach by the government, Guevara added, after criticism from many security experts that López Obrador had gone soft on the cartels, an accusation he denies.

The president argues the confrontational tactics of his predecessors were unsuccessful and only caused more bloodshed, saying he would instead pursue a strategy of “hugs not bullets”.

On Thursday morning, security forces were attempting to contain a violent reaction to the arrest in the Culiacán area by Guzmán’s associates.

Local government urged people to stay indoors and said schools and administrative offices were closed due to the violence. Unverified videos on social media appeared to show heavy gunfire, including from helicopters during the night. Street blockades had also been erected.

“We ask the citizens of Culiacán not to leave home due to the blockades that have occurred in different parts of the city,” Culiacán’s mayor, Juan de Dios Gámez, wrote on Twitter.

Joaquín Guzmán, 65, was convicted in New York in 2019 of trafficking billions of dollars of drugs to the United States and conspiring to murder enemies. He is serving a life sentence at Colorado’s Supermax, the most secure US federal prison.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Prosecutions for Jan 6 riot continue to grow
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/us/politics/jan-6-capitol-riots-prosecutions.html

WASHINGTON — The investigation into the storming of the Capitol is, by any measure, the biggest criminal inquiry in the Justice Department's 153-year history.

And even two years after Jan. 6, 2021, it is only getting bigger.

In chasing leads and making arrests, federal agents have already seized hundreds of cellphones, questioned thousands of witnesses and followed up on tens of thousands of tips in an exhaustive process that has resulted so far in more than 900 arrests from Maine to California.

But the inquiry, as vast as it has been, is still far from complete: Scores, if not hundreds, more people could face charges in the year — or years — to come, spread out over the course of many months so as not to flood the courts.

The Capitol siege investigation, as the government likes to call it, has been, among other things, a highly publicized and sophisticated effort to bring to justice extremist groups like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers militia. Both played central roles in attacking the Capitol and disrupting a pillar of American democracy on Jan. 6: the lawful transfer of presidential power.

But it has also lumbered on at a quieter level, with a series of less prominent trials and arrests that have touched the lives of more ordinary people: the members of the mob who may not have planned for violence but nonetheless broke into the Capitol that day — many after falling victim to the lies about election fraud spread by President Donald J. Trump.

At the same time, the inquiry into what happened at the Capitol has served as the backdrop to the special counsel investigation that is examining the roles that Mr. Trump and several of his aides and lawyers played in a broader attempt to overturn the results of the election. That investigation, which has so far rested largely on cellphone seizures and grand jury subpoenas, will ultimately have to determine whether Mr. Trump's norm-shattering efforts to remain in power actually violated any federal laws.

No matter where these inquiries end up, the attempts to fully understand the events leading up to Jan. 6 and to hold accountable those who inspired or took part in them has already tested the Justice Department, straining its resources, pushing it into novel legal territory and exposing it to vehement political attacks.

But over and over, the judges who have overseen criminal cases in Federal District Court in Washington have asserted that the exertions have been worth it.

"People need to ask themselves what conditions could have created that to happen and be honest with yourself when you're asking the question," Judge Amit P. Mehta said of Jan. 6 at a hearing in September.

"We cannot function as a country," he went on, "if people think they can behave violently when they lose an election."

By the Numbers

As of Wednesday, about 950 people had been charged in connection with the storming of the Capitol.

Most of the charges brought so far have been for relatively minor misdemeanors like trespassing or [illegally parading](#) in the Capitol, reflecting the fact that hundreds of rioters who went into the building did no damage to property or people. The maximum sentence for these petty offenses is six months in prison, and many defendants charged with them have been given only a few weeks in jail or have faced no time at all.

About 280 people have been charged with the more serious crime of assaulting or resisting the police, including about 100 who are facing additional charges of using a dangerous or deadly weapon. While prosecutors say only a handful of rioters were carrying — or talked about carrying — firearms on Jan. 6, an impressive list of makeshift weapons was used in the attack: flagpoles, bear spray, two-by-fours, metal poles, collapsible batons, stun guns, a hockey stick, even a skateboard.

The assault cases have yielded the stiffest penalties so far. In September, Thomas Webster, a former New York City police officer convicted of attacking an officer at the Capitol with a flagpole, was [sentenced to 10 years in prison](#), the most severe sentence yet in a Capitol riot case.

One month later, Albuquerque Cosper Head, a Tennessee resident, was [sentenced to seven and a half years in prison](#) after pleading guilty to dragging Michael Fanone, a police officer, into an angry pro-Trump crowd that brutally assaulted him and attacked him with a stun gun.

Nearly 300 people have faced an unusual charge: obstruction of an official proceeding in front of Congress. Prosecutors have used this count — originally intended to prohibit things like shredding documents or tampering with witnesses in congressional inquiries — to describe how the mob chased lawmakers out of the Capitol on Jan. 6, disrupting the final certification of the election.

The best-known defendant charged with this obstruction count is Jacob Chansley, the so-called QAnon Shaman, who was [sentenced on it in late 2021 to 41 months in prison](#).

Last month, a federal appeals court [was asked to toss the charge](#) in all of the Jan. 6 cases by defense lawyers who say it was improperly used. The lawyers argued that the law was misapplied to the Capitol riot cases and used to criminalize behavior that too closely resembled protest protected by the First Amendment.

Making a Larger Point

The government has racked up an impressive record in its Jan. 6-related trials, all of which have taken place in the federal courthouse in Washington despite repeated efforts by defense lawyers to have them moved to jurisdictions thought to be friendlier. Of the 45 defendants who have gone to trial so far, all but one — [a former government contractor from New Mexico](#) — have been convicted of most of the charges they were facing.

All trials are, in a sense, performances, and prosecutors in the Capitol riot trials have often used the proceedings to make larger points about Jan. 6 or to expose some vivid aspect of that day.

In the most prominent trial to date, [Stewart Rhodes](#), the founder and leader of the Oath Keepers, was convicted along with a lieutenant of seditious conspiracy but was acquitted of other conspiracy charges. The [mixed verdict](#) suggested something crucial about Jan. 6: that even though the jury seemed to believe the attack on the Capitol unfolded more or less spontaneously, it also believed that Mr. Rhodes had a broader plan in place to use physical force to keep Mr. Trump in power.

While the Oath Keepers trial often delved into [Mr. Rhodes's conspiratorial mind-set](#), the police assault trials have arguably been the most dramatic, featuring gripping testimony about the hand-to-hand combat that raged for hours between rioters and officers. Much of that testimony has come from officers themselves during evocative and emotional turns on the witness stand.

In September, former Sgt. Aquilino Gonell of the Capitol Police testified that the shoulder injury he suffered that day changed his life forever, robbing him of his job, his facility at basketball and his ability to coach his son in sports. At a different trial in August, former Officer Daniel Hodges described the terror of being crushed by the mob in a door at the lower west terrace of the Capitol.

“From my experience, it looked like something out of medieval times, where you have one huge force clashing with another opposing force,” a third officer, Eugene Goodman, said at yet another trial. “I’ve never seen something like that ever.”

Looking Over Their Shoulders

Almost every day, prosecutors bring a few more Capitol riot cases, some of which have been under investigation for nearly two years. Given the time lag and the steady trickle of new filings, many defense

lawyers have said that their clients who were at — or especially those who were inside — the Capitol on Jan. 6 are still looking over their shoulders, waiting to be charged.

It is impossible to know for sure how many new cases could be filed in the weeks and months to come, but prosecutors have long said that as many as 2,000 people broke the law on Jan. 6 by entering the Capitol or by committing other crimes like assaulting officers on the Capitol grounds. Whatever the number ends up being, it is significant enough that the federal bench in Washington has been told to expect a surge of cases, according to several people familiar with the matter.

“Our work is far from over,” Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said in a statement issued on Wednesday.

Jacquelyn Starer, a Massachusetts doctor, was charged last month, and her case is instructive.

The F.B.I. first received a tip about Dr. Starer, 68, five days after the Capitol was stormed, but did not arrest her until Dec. 20, 2022 — some 23 months later. The story of what happened in between, contained in the documents used to bring the charges, suggests both the thoroughness and the methodical pace of the bureau’s investigation.

One of the F.B.I.’s earliest steps was tracking down Dr. Starer’s photo from the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles. Agents also got the records from her stay at a Washington hotel and obtained the subscriber information for her cellphone, using it to determine that the phone had connected with a cell site near the Capitol on Jan. 6.

The F.B.I. had another pool of evidence in the thousands of hours of video footage it collected from the Capitol attack.

Surveillance cameras at the building showed that Dr. Starer went inside through the east Rotunda doors at 2:51 p.m. that day, court papers say. Body camera footage from the police, the papers say, showed her balling up a fist and punching an officer just eight minutes later.

Investigators ultimately interviewed the officer, known in the papers only as M.B. The officer recalled that a blonde woman, fitting Dr. Starer’s description, struck her on the left side of her head.

Robert Sheketoff, Ms. Starer’s lawyer, said that waiting a long time for charges to be filed is a mixed blessing that gives defendants the opportunity to keep living a normal life — albeit one cast in shadow.

“It’s both a good thing and bad thing,” Mr. Sheketoff said. “A double-edged sword.”

Unanswered Questions

Despite the F.B.I.’s tenacity in pursuing Capitol riot cases, several aspects of the investigation remain unresolved.

Chief among the mysteries is the identity of the person who left [pipe bombs](#) on Jan. 5, 2021, outside the Democratic and Republican Party headquarters, blocks from the Capitol. The bombs, which had crude mechanical timing devices, were discovered on the afternoon of Jan. 6, causing havoc in Washington.

Investigators have periodically [released information about the bomber](#), including videos showing a person dressed in gloves and a hoodie, and a map drawn from surveillance camera footage showing the route the person walked while placing the bombs. Still, the F.B.I. has been unable to identify whomever was responsible.

While much of the bureau’s efforts remain shrouded in secrecy, some unresolved threads of its inquiry have emerged from the shadows.

One of those concerns the ways in which a “Stop the Steal” protest of the 2018 Senate race in Florida may have [served as a model](#) for what happened in Washington on Jan. 6. In recent months, prosecutors have been asking questions about key players in the earlier demonstration — among them, the political operative Roger J. Stone Jr. and Jacob Engels, an associate of Mr. Stone connected to the Proud Boys — in an effort to determine whether the tactics used in Florida were also used at the Capitol.

Some people who played central roles in the Capitol attack even remain at large and unidentified in spite of the array of high-tech tools — like cellphone tracing and facial recognition — at the F.B.I.’s disposal. These mysterious figures have been studied closely by an army of online sleuths known as sedition hunters who have tracked their movements during the attack through thousands of hours of video.

At some point, the F.B.I. might track them down and arrest them. But for now, they are largely known by the colorful hashtag names given to them by amateur investigators — monikers like [#LemonyKickIt](#), [#NWScaffoldCommander](#) and [#SandStoneHoodie](#).

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HEADLINE	01/05 Mexico captures El Chapo’s son again
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/05/world/americas/el-chapo-son-ovidio-guzman-mexico.html
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — The Mexican authorities announced on Thursday that they had captured a son of the drug lord El Chapo in an early morning operation in Culiacán, a northwestern city that has long been the home base of the Sinaloa cartel.</p> <p>Security forces arrested Ovidio Guzmán López, a son of Joaquín Guzmán Loera, the infamous crime lord known as El Chapo, and transferred him to a special prosecutor’s office in Mexico City, the Mexican secretary of defense said in a news conference.</p> <p>The capture of El Chapo’s son, himself a prominent cartel leader, allows the government to claim a victory in its halting efforts to combat violence during one of the deadliest periods in Mexico’s recent history.</p> <p>“This arrest represents a resounding blow to the leadership of the Pacific cartel,” the secretary of defense, Luis Cresencio Sandoval, said at a news conference, using another name for the Sinaloa cartel.</p> <p>“Attacks by the criminal group continue,” Mr. Cresencio said, noting that the cartel had responded to the arrest with road blocks and shootouts. The authorities, he said, are still working “to restore and maintain public order.”</p> <p>The arrest was an opportunity for the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to make amends for a similar but botched operation three years ago, when the Mexican authorities briefly detained Mr. Guzmán López but were then forced to set him free after cartel gunmen overpowered law enforcement.</p> <p>It also provided the government a public relations win days before Mr. López Obrador is set to host President Biden and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada at a North American Leaders Summit in Mexico City.</p> <p>But experts were skeptical that the capture of Ovidio Guzmán López, long known as the least accomplished of Mr. Guzmán’s sons, would have any meaningful impact on cartel activities.</p> <p>“It is a message to the United States that Mexico continues the war against drugs,” said Alejandro Hope, a security analyst in Mexico City. “Does it change the structure of the Sinaloa cartel? No. Will it have an impact on drug trafficking? No. Will it reduce violence? No.”</p> <p>The cartel reacted swiftly and violently to the arrest. Videos shared on social media showed buses and tractor-trailers aflame. Shots were reported near the Culiacán airport, which announced on Twitter that it had shut down operations for security reasons.</p>

Armed groups lit vehicles on fire and blocked all the major roads out of Culiacán, according to a local intelligence officer. Gunmen fought law enforcement in the north of the city, where loud explosions could be heard and armed groups were stealing cars at gunpoint, the official said. Schools and government buildings were closed.

The intelligence official, who was not authorized to speak publicly, added that there were no public services and that streets were mostly empty.

Aeromexico, the Mexican carrier, said that at least one bullet had hit the fuselage of a commercial plane that was set to take off for Mexico City on Thursday morning. The airline said everyone on board was safe and that the flight had been canceled.

The intelligence officer confirmed that armed groups had fired on a military plane as it was arriving at the Culiacán airport on Thursday morning but that there were no reported injuries.

César Lara, 29, was walking away from the Culiacán airport after arriving on a flight from Mexico City Thursday morning when he saw a military plane landing and then heard gunshots, he said.

Not knowing where the gunfire was coming from, Mr. Lara ran back to the airport, where he and other passengers from his flight remained stranded as of Thursday afternoon. The airport was locked down, he said, and no one was allowed to leave.

“The only thing I want is to be at home, in peace and calm,” Mr. Lara said.

The Guzmán family has a long history of escaping capture by the Mexican authorities. El Chapo broke out of prison twice. Federal prosecutors in the United States say his sons helped orchestrate his infamous escape from a maximum-security detention center in 2015 through a mile-long tunnel dug into the shower of his cell.

Mr. Guzmán López’s American lawyer, Jeffrey Lichtman, who also represented the father, declined to comment on Thursday’s arrest. Officials with the United States Justice Department, which filed charges against Mr. Guzmán López and one of his brothers in 2019, refused to comment on whether prosecutors have requested extradition.

In October 2019, the security forces stormed Culiacán, detained Mr. Guzmán López and then released him after cartel gunmen unleashed a wave of automatic gunfire on the city, burned cars and took members of the security forces hostage.

At the time, Mr. López Obrador defended the release, saying that the authorities had to balance detaining Mr. Guzmán López against ensuring the public’s safety.

“The situation turned very bad and lots of citizens were at risk, lots of people, and it was decided to protect the life of the people,” Mr. López Obrador told reporters. “You cannot value the life of a delinquent more than the lives of the people.”

But the episode became a national humiliation for the López Obrador administration and cast doubt on the government’s ability to take on cartels in the areas of the country where they have the most power.

Mr. Guzmán López and his brother, Joaquín Guzmán López, were charged in February 2019 by federal prosecutors for “knowingly, intentionally, and willfully” distributing cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana for import into the United States.

Those charges were made public just one day after the elder Mr. Guzmán was convicted after a three-month trial in Brooklyn that revealed the inner workings of the Sinaloa cartel and how it sent tons of drugs into the United States.

	The same team of prosecutors also brought federal drug charges against the elder Mr. Guzmán's most recent wife, Emma Coronel Aispuro. Ms. Coronel later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to three years in prison.
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HEADLINE	01/05 Police early close eye on suspect
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/idaho-murders-shocking-court-documents-reveal-police-began-suspecting-bryan-christopher-kohberger-less-than-2-weeks-after-idaho-murders
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, Idaho - Newly obtained court documents reveal that authorities investigating the University of Idaho student killings had been keeping a close eye on suspect Bryan Kohberger well before his identity was released to the public.</p> <p>On Dec. 30, authorities announced that Kohberger had been arrested in connection to the murders of Kaylee Goncalves, Maddie Mogen, Xana Kernodle, and Ethan Chapin. Before then, no information about a suspect was known publicly other than police were searching for a white Hyundai Elantra.</p> <p>According to court documents unsealed on Jan. 5, authorities had a suspect description quite early in the investigation, and Kohberger matched it on Nov. 29 – more than a month before the nation knew his identity.</p> <p>Throughout the investigation, many were convinced that the case would go cold. The family of the victims seemed to lose confidence in the police investigation, even calling them ‘cowards’ for not sharing more with the public.</p> <p>In response to the outpour of questions and thousands of tips, police would often say words to the effect of "we cannot share that information in order to maintain the integrity of the investigation."</p> <p>Here are some key pieces of information from the investigation that were not made public:</p> <p>POLICE HAD A SUSPECT DESCRIPTION THE WHOLE TIME</p> <p>A little more than two weeks after the Nov. 13 slayings, authorities reported not having any new suspects in the case. In a previous article published on Nov. 29, FOX News Digital spoke to other University of Idaho students on campus who were concerned with what little information they had on whom the suspect, or suspects, might be.</p> <p>According to court documents, two other students living in the house where the murders took place were unharmed. Though one of them witnessed the suspect leaving the scene first-hand and reported him to police. The public did not learn this until court documents became public in January.</p> <p>SUSPECT DESCRIPTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Male standing at 5'10" or taller • Wore black clothing and a mask that covered his nose and mouth • Had ‘bushy’ eyebrows • Athletic build, but not very muscular <p>Identified only as D.M., the witness told authorities she heard what she thought was Goncalves playing with her dog in one of the upstairs bedrooms at around 4:00 a.m. – which was the time the stabbings took place. Shortly after, she said she heard Goncalves say something to the effect of "There's someone here."</p> <p>D.M. told police she checked outside her door, but did not see anyone. She then opened her door a second time after she heard crying coming out of Kernodle's room, and a man say something to the effect of "it's okay, I'm going to help you."</p>

D.M. told police she opened the door a third time, and saw the suspect walking toward her. He walked past her as she stood in a "frozen shock phase." She said the suspect then walked toward the back sliding glass door, and she locked herself in her room.

THE SUSPECT VEHICLE

On Dec. 7, the Moscow Police Department made a public announcement saying they would like to speak with occupants of a white 2011-2013 Hyundai Elantra. According to court documents, area law enforcement were asked to be on the lookout for the vehicle on Nov. 25.

Police said they searched for videos all around the murder scene and found several videos showing a White Elantra making three passes by the house before stopping at 4:04 a.m. One surveillance video showed the car leaving at a high rate of speed at 4:20 a.m.

On Nov. 29, Pullman Police queried white Elantras registered at Washington State University. Authorities found a 2015 model with a Pennsylvania license plate, registered to Kohberger.

The Elantra police were searching for did not appear to have a front license plate in any surveillance footage from the night of Nov. 13. According to court documents, detectives learned that displaying a front license plate is not required in the state of Pennsylvania.

KOHBERGER WAS PINNED AS THE SUSPECT A MONTH BEFORE HIS ARREST

The same day, a Pullman police officer spotted the white Elantra in a parking lot. According to court documents, the officer ran the car, and it returned to Kohberger with a Washington tag and driver's license.

Authorities say they were then able to match Kohberger to the suspect description by looking at his I.D.

KOHBERGER MATCHES SUSPECT DESCRIPTION

- White male with a height of 6', weight of 185 pounds
- Photograph shows 'Bushy Eyebrows'

Kohberger, a 28-year-old doctoral student and teaching assistant at Washington State University, was arrested by state police at his parents' home in eastern Pennsylvania last Friday. He [waived extradition Tuesday afternoon](#), after which he was flown to Moscow on Jan. 4.

Kohberger then appeared in court in Latah County, Idaho where a judge ordered he be held without bond. He faces four counts of first-degree murder and one count of burglary for entering the home.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Seattle police arrest 4, recover stolen guns
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/4-guns-recovered-after-seattle-police-tail-men-stolen-car-central-district-tukwila/QYILN2C23BHDNDK3YTAHKLQXBA/
GIST	<p>Seattle police arrested four men and recovered four guns after tailing the men in a stolen car from Seattle's Central District to Tukwila on Tuesday night.</p> <p>According to police, around 10:30 p.m. Tuesday, officers were patrolling near the Judkins Park neighborhood when they saw the four men in a stolen Hyundai sedan. Officers tried stopping the car but the driver sped away.</p> <p>Officers maintained a visual of the car and followed it to a gas station in the 14400 block of Tukwila International Boulevard where the men got out of the car and went into a convenience store.</p> <p>Several of the men tried running away when officers attempted to make contact, but they were all taken into custody.</p>

	<p>Police said all four men were carrying loaded guns, one of which was reported stolen.</p> <p>The men, who are all between the ages of 19 and 22, were booked into the King County Jail for crimes including unlawful firearms possession, possession of a stolen vehicle, possession of a stolen firearm, eluding, obstruction, resisting arrest, and unlawful carrying of a firearm.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Federal Way: 5 teens arrested for robbery
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/federal-way/5-teen-boys-arrested-robbery-driving-stolen-car-federal-way-commons/281-3fd25ac9-9818-42fc-ac12-ca19df67744d
GIST	<p>FEDERAL WAY, Wash. — Five teen males were arrested at The Commons at Federal Way Thursday afternoon after they were spotted driving a stolen car that was connected to a robbery.</p> <p>The vehicle was reported stolen out of the 2200 block of Franklin Avenue Northeast in the Eastlake neighborhood of Seattle earlier in the day, according to the Seattle Police Department (SPD).</p> <p>Officers were called to the 6500 block of 15th Avenue in Ballard around 12 p.m. Thursday for a report of a robbery. A victim said the suspects had stolen his phone and backpack along with other items. The victim sustained minor injuries from the robbery. SPD said the suspects fled from the scene in two stolen vehicles.</p> <p>Officers tried to stop the cars when they were spotted in the Victory Heights neighborhood but they fled, according to SPD.</p> <p>Officers from the north precinct later spotted one of the cars traveling southbound on Interstate 5. A helicopter from the King County Sheriff's Office, the Washington State Patrol and the Federal Way Police Department were able to help track the car to The Commons at Federal Way.</p> <p>The driver parked the car and then all five teens fled into The Commons. Officers followed the boys into the shopping mall and engaged in a brief foot pursuit, according to SPD.</p> <p>All five teens were arrested after they exited the mall a short time later.</p> <p>SPD was able to recover the stolen vehicle and the items stolen from the strongarm robbery. SPD did not provide the specific ages of the teens.</p> <p>Detectives with the General Investigations Unit are looking into whether the teens were involved in other incidents including stolen cars, car prowls and an armed robbery.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Suspect's DNA found on knife sheath
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/idaho-murders/court-documents-suspect-dna-knife-sheath-university-idaho-student-killings/281-dc6bdc9c-bba0-4e0b-a97e-7833480fa88c
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Investigators reportedly found DNA on a knife sheath and used cellphone data to track down the suspect in the murder of four University of Idaho students in November.</p> <p>According to the documents that were unsealed Thursday, investigators found a knife sheath, with "Ka-Bar" "USMC" and the United States Marine Corps eagle globe and anchor insignia stamped on the outside of it, in the bedroom of one of the victims.</p> <p>DNA evidence obtained from the knife at the scene and from Bryan Kohberger's parents' house was tested at the Idaho State Lab, court documents say. The results showed the DNA from the parent's house was almost certainly from the father of the person whose DNA was on the knife.</p>

Investigators also reportedly obtained multiple videos from the King Road neighborhood in Moscow, Idaho allegedly showing 28-year-old Kohberger's Hyundai Elantra driving around several times beginning at 3:30 a.m. on Nov. 13. Court documents said the vehicle was seen leaving the area at a high rate of speed at around 4:20 a.m.

Investigators believe the killings happened between 4 a.m. and 4:25 a.m.

Investigators were also able to corroborate the cell phone data with the route Kohberger's vehicle took according to the multiple surveillance videos.

Investigators said cellphone data indicate Kohberger turned off his cellphone during the killings. Before data cut out at 2:47 a.m., it showed Kohberger left his apartment and traveled south through Pullman. When Kohberger's phone reports back to the network at 4:48 a.m., the phone was near Blaine, Idaho, which is south of Moscow. Data shows Kohberger then returns to his Pullman apartment.

The documents said the cell phone was found to be near the victims' residence at least 12 times prior to Nov. 13, including one time on Aug. 21.

What the surviving roommates saw, heard

The documents also revealed one of the roommates woke up around 4 a.m. to what sounded like one of the victims playing with her dog before hearing the victim say, "there's someone here."

The roommate said she looked outside her room after but didn't see anything. The roommate reportedly later heard what sounded like crying from another victim's bedroom and heard a male say something to the effect of "It's ok. I'm going to help you."

The roommate opened her door a third time after hearing the crying and reportedly saw a man in "black clothing and a mask" walking toward her that she didn't recognize. The roommate told investigators the man walked past her as she stood in a "frozen shock phase." She said she closed her door and locked it as the man left through a sliding door.

The suspect's arrest, extradition

Kohberger, who was arrested Dec. 30, was transferred from Pennsylvania State Police custody to Idaho Wednesday morning where he faces four counts of first-degree murder and felony burglary. Kohberger waived his extradition rights at his court hearing in Monroe County, Penn. on Tuesday.

Kohberger had his first appearance hearing in Idaho on Thursday. Kohberger's court-appointed attorney requested bail, which was denied by Idaho Magistrate Judge Megan E. Marshall. A no-contact order was also issued for the families of the victims as well as several other individuals.

The arrest comes nearly seven weeks after the [students' bodies were found in an off-campus home](#). The students – Madison Mogen, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Kaylee Goncalves, 21, of Rathdrum, Idaho; Xana Kernodle, 20, of Post Falls, Idaho; and [Ethan Chapin](#), 20, of Conway, Washington – were found stabbed to death Nov. 13 in a rental house.

FBI agents tracked Kohberger from Washington state to eastern Pennsylvania for several days leading up to his arrest. According to investigators, Kohberger and his father made the 2,500-mile road trip in a white Hyundai, the same make and model as a car spotted near the murder scene.

On Dec. 31, Kohberger's attorney in Pennsylvania Jason LaBar said his client is "[eager to be exonerated](#)."

In a statement, Kohberger's family said they promote his presumption of innocence but also "care deeply for the four families who have lost their precious children."

"There are no words that can adequately express the sadness we feel, and we pray each day for them," the family said.

	What happens next Kohberger's next court appearance, which will be a status hearing, was set for Jan. 12 at 10 a.m.
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HEADLINE	01/05 Timeline: identifying Idaho suspect
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/TIMELINE-DNA-video-lead-officials-to-Idaho-17697619.php
GIST	<p>Court documents unsealed Thursday after the suspect in the November fatal stabbings of four University of Idaho students made his first court appearance in Idaho reveal the timeline for how Bryan Kohberger went from being on law enforcement radar to becoming the man charged with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of burglary. Below is a timeline from the documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nov. 13, 2022: Ethan Chapin and Xana Kernodle returned to the King Road house, where Kernodle was living, at about 1:45 a.m. after visiting the Sigma Chi house on the University of Idaho campus. Kaylee Goncalves and Madison Mogen were at a local bar in Moscow between 10 p.m. on Nov. 12, 2022 until 1:30 a.m. on Nov. 13. They visited a food truck and then an unnamed person gave them a ride at about 1:56 a.m. to the King Road house, where they were living. Two unharmed roommates identified in the affidavit as D.M. and B.F. said everyone was home by 2 a.m. and in their rooms by 4 a.m. - Nov. 13, 2022: The suspect's vehicle, a white sedan, was seen on Washington State University surveillance cameras traveling away from campus at about 2:53 a.m. - Nov. 13, 2022.: Kernodle received a DoorDash order at about 4 a.m. - Nov. 13, 2022: Unharmed roommate D.M. was awoken at about 4 a.m. to what sounded like Goncalves playing with her dog in a bedroom on the third floor. Soon after, D.M. said she heard what sounded like Goncalves say something like, "there's someone here." Cellphone records show that it might have been Kernodle who made the statement. - Nov. 13, 2022: D.M. reported thinking she heard crying from Kernodle's room and heard a male voice saying something like, "it's ok, I'm going to help you." - Nov. 13, 2022: At about 4:17 a.m., a security camera at a house northwest of the King Road residence picked up the sound of voices or a whimper followed by a loud thud. - Nov. 13, 2022: D.M. opened her door a third time after she heard crying and saw a man with bushy eyebrows dressed in black with a mask over his nose and mouth walking toward her. She froze and the man walked to the sliding glass door and she locked herself in her room. - Nov. 13, 2022: Investigators believe the four students were killed between 4 a.m. and 4:25 a.m. Police investigators arrived and located the bodies of the students, along with a tan leather knife sheath that carried the suspect's DNA and a shoe print outside the roommate's door. - Nov. 13, 2022: Footage from security videos show the suspect's vehicle in the King Road neighborhood starting at 3:29 a.m. Police say it made three passes by the house and made a fourth pass at about 4:04 a.m. before leaving the area at a high rate of speed at about 4:20 a.m. - Nov. 13, 2022: Surveillance video recorded the suspect vehicle in Pullman and the WSU campus around 5:25 a.m. - Nov. 18, 2022: Bryan Kohberger changed the registration of his white Elantra from Pennsylvania plates to Washington state license plates. - Nov. 25, 2022: Law enforcement were on the lookout for a Hyundai Elantra.

	<p>- Nov. 29, 2022: A WSU police officer learned that a 2015 white Elantra with a Pennsylvania license plate was registered to Bryan Kohberger. The officer tracked down Kohberger's driver's license and noted that he was a white male, 6-feet tall and weighed about 185 pounds (83.91 kilograms). His photograph showed bushy eyebrows.</p> <p>- Dec. 13, 2022: Kohberger's vehicle was seen in Loma, Colorado.</p> <p>- Dec. 15, 2022: Kohberger, traveling to Pennsylvania with his father, was stopped by law enforcement in Hancock County, Indiana.</p> <p>- Dec. 23, 2022: Officials obtained a warrant to search Kohberger's phone records. They show that the phone was in Pullman at 2:42 a.m. on Nov. 13, 2022 but then stops reporting to the network. It does not connect again until 4:48 a.m.</p> <p>- Dec. 29, 2022: Based on the information gathered, law enforcement secured an arrest warrant for Bryan Kohberger. He was taken into custody early in the morning by the Pennsylvania State Police at a home in Chestnuthill Township.</p> <p>- Jan. 3, 2023: Kohberger appeared at Pennsylvania's Monroe County Courthouse and agreed to waive extradition in order to be moved back to Idaho to face charges.</p> <p>- Jan. 4, 2023: Kohberger arrived in Moscow on a small plane.</p> <p>- Jan. 5, 2023: Kohberger made his first court appearance in Latah County and the court records in the case have been unsealed.</p>
Return to Top	Click on link to download affidavit: https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/idaho-affidavit-redacted-2/bddc5c2c9dd2ac31/full.pdf

HEADLINE	01/05 WA authorities helped track Idaho suspect
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/how-wa-authorities-helped-track-down-university-of-idaho-murder-suspect/
GIST	<p>Documents unsealed Thursday in the killing of four University of Idaho students detail the role Washington police played in identifying and apprehending a Pullman graduate student accused in the homicides.</p> <p>Police used Washington State University vehicle records and traffic-camera footage to identify 28-year-old Bryan Kohberger, who was arrested last week in Pennsylvania and extradited to Idaho, where he faces four counts of first-degree murder and a single count of felony burglary.</p> <p>Kohberger appeared for the first time Thursday in Latah County District Court in Moscow, marking the latest development in a case that has gripped the college town and seized national media attention.</p> <p>The unsealed affidavit, written by Moscow Police Cpl. Brett Payne, offers the public's first glimpse at the reasoning behind Latah County prosecutor's accusations against Kohberger in the Nov. 13 stabbing deaths of Kaylee Goncalves, Madison Mogen, Xana Kernodle and Conway resident Ethan Chapin.</p> <p>The affidavit shows that Washington licensing records and WSU police officers helped investigators connect the description of a possible suspect vehicle to Kohberger. Pullman police also provided information on Kohberger's educational background.</p> <p>Investigators said a white Hyundai Elantra made between 2011 and 2016 was seen on surveillance footage before and after the homicides in the neighborhood where the students were killed.</p>

	<p>Payne wrote that investigators saw on WSU surveillance footage a similar car traveling away from Pullman in the hours before investigators believe the killings occurred. FBI officials reviewed the footage and determined the vehicle was an Elantra made between 2014 and 2016.</p> <p>Around two weeks after the killings, the Moscow Police Department asked WSU police officers to be on the lookout for white Elantras. A few days later, a WSU officer looked up white Elantras registered at the university and found a 2015 Elantra registered to Kohberger.</p> <p>The same day, another WSU police officer also saw the car in the parking lot of Kohberger's home and looked up his driver's license information and photograph, according to the court document.</p> <p>Payne wrote that he also reviewed body-camera footage and a report from an October 2022 WSU police traffic stop involving the 2015 Elantra, which indicated that Kohberger was driving the car. Payne also said he reviewed Washington licensing records and learned the car had previously been registered in Pennsylvania.</p> <p>Pullman police also shared records from Kohberger's application for an internship in the fall of 2022. The records showed Kohberger has undergraduate degrees in psychology and cloud-based forensics and was interested in helping rural law enforcement agencies collect and analyze data.</p> <p>Kohberger was a graduate student in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at WSU's Pullman campus, about 10 miles from where the killings occurred.</p>
Return to Top	<i>Click on source link to read affidavit</i>

HEADLINE	01/06 Miami restaurant shooting: 10 injured
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/10-reportedly-injured-in-shooting-at-miami-restaurant-during-french-montana-video-shoot
GIST	<p>Authorities are continuing to investigate a shooting outside a Miami Gardens restaurant Thursday night which left at least 10 people injured, according to multiple reports.</p> <p>The shooting may have involved rappers French Montana and Rob49, as the two were recording a music video in the area, according to WFOR-TV.</p> <p>Miami Gardens police responded to the shooting outside The Licking restaurant just before 8 p.m., where they found multiple victims, according to WSVN. Police have not confirmed the number of injured, though sources told the station it was more than 10.</p> <p>Paramedics and Miami-Dade Fire Rescue also responded to the scene, transporting four of the victims to area hospitals, with one in critical condition.</p> <p>Other victims transported themselves to the hospital, WFOR reported.</p> <p>A witness of the shooting told WFOR-TV that it happened during rapper French Montana's music video, which was being recorded near the restaurant.</p> <p>The witness recalled hearing 10-15 gunshots before seeing people ran chaotically.</p> <p>"We're still working [the scene]. Yeah, there's multiple shots, there's multiple cases," said MGPD detective Diana Gorgue, per WSVN. "We're still working. We can't confirm any numbers at this moment, because everything is still fresh, and they're still investigating."</p> <p>According to WSVN, witness Ced Mogul said he came out of the restaurant to watch the rapper shoot the video. At some point a person in the crowd watching the production was robbed of his watch and wallet, which caused the situation to escalate, Mogul explained.</p>

	<p>Mogul said, "It was like at least 13, 14, 15 gunshots. It was very rapid, it sounded like an assault rifle. I took off running, and I was looking back, but I was like, 'You know what? Let me just duck first, and then people started asking me, you know, 'Can you help me?' When I realized people were asking for help, there was nothing you could do about it when you got shot."</p> <p>The status of the other victims is not known at this time but there are no fatalities.</p> <p>Police have not provided information on a possible suspect or suspects but remain on the scene.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 NY seized record amount fentanyl 2022
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/new-york-state-seized-record-amount-fentanyl-2022/story?id=96240233
GIST	<p>Authorities seized record amounts of fentanyl-laced prescription pills and powder in New York state in 2022, fueling more than 2,300 fatal overdoses in New York City alone, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the New York City Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor said Thursday.</p> <p>Fentanyl is the most dangerous drug to ever hit the streets and the DEA's New York Division, covering the entire state, seized 1.9 million fentanyl-laced, fake prescription pills in 2022, a 152% increase from the prior year.</p> <p>The agency seized nearly 2,000 pounds of fentanyl powder, the equivalent of 72 million lethal doses.</p> <p>"To put that into perspective, throughout 2022 we seized enough deadly doses of fentanyl in New York for more than three times the population of New York State," DEA Special Agent in Charge Frank A. Tarentino said in a statement.</p> <p>In 2022, cases handled by New York City's Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor resulted in the seizure of nearly 1 million counterfeit pills containing fentanyl, an increase of more than 425% over 2021.</p> <p>"Thousands of New Yorkers are mourning precious lives claimed by deadly fentanyl last year," Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan said in a statement. "Fentanyl saturates the illegal drug supply in New York City and is a factor in roughly 80% of overdose deaths."</p> <p>Mexican drug cartels often press fentanyl into counterfeit pills designed to look like blue oxycodone pills, or in a number of colors, often referred to as rainbow fentanyl. The DEA issued a warning in August about the multicolor pills, saying they were being used to target children and young people.</p> <p>Fentanyl trafficked by the Sinaloa and CJNG drug cartels is produced at secret factories in Mexico with chemicals largely from China, the DEA said.</p> <p>The DEA announced in late December that it had seized a record 50.6 million fentanyl-laced, fake prescription pills and more than 10,000 pounds of fentanyl powder nationwide in 2022.</p> <p>"These seizures – enough deadly doses of fentanyl to kill every American – reflect the DEA's unwavering commitment to protect Americans and save lives, by tenaciously pursuing those responsible for the trafficking of fentanyl across the United States," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in a statement at the time.</p>
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